

AMBASSADOR ROBERT M. BEECROFT

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is the 17th of September, 2004. This is an interview with Robert M. Beecroft. What does that stand for?

BEECROFT: Mason.

Q: Mason. Beecroft. B-E-E-C-R-O-F-T.

BEECROFT: Right. It's been spelled many different ways across the years.

Q: This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. You go by Bob?

BEECROFT: I go by Bob.

Q: So, let's start at the beginning. Can you tell me when and where you were born and a little about your parents, starting on your father's side?

BEECROFT: Well, nothing is simple. I was born in Newark, New Jersey on December 5, 1940. I was adopted at the age of four months and I met my birth mother on her deathbed, after a lengthy search process. I never met my birth father. So my adoptive parents were my actual parents for all intents and purposes. Edmund and Margaree everyone called her Peg - Beecroft were married in 1934. We lived in North Jersey, in a small town called Little Falls, which had stopped being a farming town by the time I grew up there and was fast becoming a bedroom town for New York City, thirty miles away.

Q: Can you tell me, since we'll be talking about your adoptive parents since I guess they were the most influential?

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: : Where did your father come from?

BEECROFT: Ed Beecroft was from Paterson, New Jersey. His grandparents had come from England. Beecroft is a north English name. A croft is a small farm. Evidently, in this case they raised bees. The Beecrofts came over to New Jersey toward the end of the 19th century. Margaret "Peg" Beecroft's family was Scottish. They were Camerons. My mother and father met in high school in Paterson. At that time, Paterson was the silk capital of the United States, and both sets of grandparents had come to Paterson because they were silk workers in places like Manchester and Glasgow. The opportunities were greater in the U.S. My maternal grandfather, George Eaton, was also a musician, a clarinetist in a concert band in Paterson's Robinson's Band.

Q: Had your adoptive parents ever gone to college or not?

BEECROFT: My father went to Brooklyn Law School. He was the first person in his family to go beyond high school. Ed Beecroft went to work as a law clerk in 1923, at a Wall Street firm called White and Case, which is now one of the world's largest law firms. He used to commute on foot across the Brooklyn Bridge to save money, on his way from Brooklyn Law School to 14 Wall Street. He stayed at White and Case from 1923 until the day he retired in 1975. He passed away just a year later. He was deeply devoted to that firm, which opened the door for him from a really basic background.

Q: And your mother?

BEECROFT: After high school, my mother studied to become a grammar school teacher at what was then Montclair Normal School, now Montclair State University. She taught until I came along in 1940, then when I went off to boarding school and college, she went back to teaching. She taught in the West Paterson, New Jersey public school system and also taught Sunday School at the Little Falls, New Jersey Methodist Church. She died in 1985.

Q: Had the adoption come about because they had known your birth mother or was it a regular adoption?

BEECROFT: No. It was a regular adoption. They went to whatever the name of the home was in Trenton, New Jersey and there I was. To the best of my knowledge, they never knew my birth mother's name, which was Elinor Dalton.

Q: How about what field of law did your father work on?

BEECROFT: He specialized in estate and trust work. Of course, that's a major field in New York. He was working at 14 Wall Street, which was White & Case's only office then, at the time of the crash of 1929. He had some really colorful stories; I'll never forget them. He described how radio stations broadcast warnings to pedestrians to walk close to the sides of buildings, because when people jumped out of windows they would describe an arc and land in the middle of the street. Cars at that time had canvas roofs, so you can imagine what happened. Among the few people who did fairly well during the Depression were lawyers. In the late 1950's, White and Case took what was then considered a radical step and opened an uptown office at 280 Park Avenue. There was a huge gap between Wall Street culture and the Park/Madison Avenue world. My Dad was one of the brave souls who was chosen to open the 280 Park office, and stayed there until his retirement in 1975. He worked with Frank Lloyd Wright on the Guggenheim Museum, and he did the legal work on the Seagram Building, which was across the street from the Park Avenue office.

Q: A famous architectural landmark.

BEECROFT: Exactly. The architect was Eero Saarinen, who also designed Dulles Airport.

Q: Well, now before you went away to school, where did you go to school early on?

BEECROFT: I went to Little Falls, New Jersey Public School No. 1 through eighth grade. I did my freshman year of secondary school at the local high school - Passaic Valley High School in Little Falls. But my Dad knew a lot of people at his law firm who gone to very good boarding schools in New England, and whose children did the same. After a year at Passaic Valley High, that seemed like a good idea. So off I went to the Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, Connecticut.

Q: Oh, yes. Well, then you, let's talk about the grammar school thing. Did you have favorite subjects?

BEECROFT: I loved history and language, and still do. I never changed much in that regard. I'm interested in human behavior and human history.

Q: How about reading? Were you a reader?

BEECROFT: Voracious. Yes. National Geographics, encyclopedias, whatever I could get my hands on. And music. I'm still a music lover.

Q: In music, what are you talking about?

BEECROFT: Classical mostly, some jazz, but mostly classical. I have a very large collection of classical CDs - I still have some vinyl in fact. I've never lost my love for music and my wife and I have performed and sung in many different places.

Q: What do you do, do you sing or do you play instruments?

BEECROFT: I used to play the French horn, but I would not inflict that on anybody now. Mette and I have sung in choirs and choruses for a long time.

Q: How about at home, were matters of the world discussed over the dinner table and all that?

BEECROFT: Not a whole lot. I think my mother in some ways was more interested in world affairs than my father, who was very much absorbed in the law. That was his life, but my mother listened to the radio news a lot - WOR New York, I still remember.

Q: Did the outside world intrude much, I'm talking about pretty much when you were in grammar school?

BEECROFT: The first major political event I can remember was the presidential campaign of 1948.

Q: That was Truman and Dewey.

BEECROFT: Truman and Dewey. I recall that my parents didn't like Dewey. I also remember very clearly the day the Korean War began because I was home eating lunch with my mother and the announcement came over the radio.

Q: June 25, 1950.

BEECROFT: Exactly. Kate Smith and Ted Collins announced it. Then of course there were the presidential campaigns of the 1952 and '56, and the McCarthy episode. I remember being galvanized by the Army-McCarthy hearings. I have a wonderful video called Point of Order, which is a fantastic compendium of the TV coverage of those hearings.

Q: Oh yes. Well, your father being a Wall Street lawyer, I would have thought that he was pretty heavily on the Republican side. Was he?

BEECROFT: He was certainly a Republican, but he was sickened by McCarthy. He was always willing to support the person he thought was the more worthy. He voted for Kennedy in 1960 because he didn't like Nixon. He was very much a middle-of-the-roader.

Q: How did you find your education in grammar school?

BEECROFT: I was very lucky. This was still the era of teachers who fancied themselves grandes dames, with purple hair, who had grown up at the turn of the 20th century. They had high standards and didn't take any nonsense. It's funny; when I talk with people from Little Falls of my vintage, we all feel the same way. The teachers who brooked no misconduct and kept you on the straight and narrow, or put you there. Mrs. Simpson and Mrs. Welland, well, we all remember the names of teachers who made a difference. We got a very good grounding. These ladies stretched our horizons. They were remarkable. I think their generation did our generation a lot of good.

Q: Can you think of any books that you read in this early period that sort of turned you on or were seminal in your thinking?

BEECROFT: Yes, well, there was one teacher, my fourth-grade teacher, her name was Maude Tunis and she was from Maryland, which we regarded as very exotic. She introduced us to a book called Misty of Chincoteague. Chincoteague might as well have been in Greece. People thought this was just fantastic - are there really places like that? Another was an author from New Jersey named Albert Payson Terhune, who wrote about dogs and actually came and talked to our class once.

Q: Collies.

BEECROFT: Collies, exactly. The dog was named Lad.

Q: What was the student body like there?

BEECROFT: Very mixed. This was a community where a number of the old pre-Revolutionary War Dutch families still existed. There were the DeYoungs and the Van der Schafts and the Corneliuses and other Dutch families that had been in North Jersey since the time of New Amsterdam. There are still a number of old brownstone houses, Dutch farmhouses, in the Passaic Valley. In fact, the old quarry down along the Passaic River in Little Falls provided the brownstone for Trinity Church in New York, on Broadway at the head of Wall Street. Every Christmas, children would bring Dutch-style cookies to school. The first foreign language I ever heard was Dutch, because after World War II a number of these families had relatives in the Netherlands whose children were barely getting by. So their American relatives brought the children over and these kids went to school with us for a while. After the Dutch, there was the next wave - the English, Scotch and Irish. Then there were quite a few Italians, the most recent arrivals at the time. There we were at School No. 1, coexisting more or less peacefully together; on the playground there was very little grouping by nationality. Oh, there were also some Russians. There was a Russian Orthodox Church in a part of Little Falls called Singac.

Q: How about as kids, what sort of activities did you have?

BEECROFT: Baseball, a lot of baseball.

Q: Sandlot, I take it?

BEECROFT: yes, there was sandlot and a lot of going to major league games. My Dad took me to Ebbets Field in the glory days of Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella.

Q: Peewee Reese.

BEECROFT: Peewee Reese, all those guys, oh man, that was great. We also went to the Polo Grounds and Yankee Stadium, but I was never a Giants or Yankees fan. Pro football hadn't really caught on, but high school football was popular. Our high school team was very well supported, though they were pretty terrible.

Q: I was just interviewing Janie Cole, a USIA officer who was brought up in Brooklyn and said she never got over the departure of the Dodgers from Brooklyn. She could never feel the same about sports.

BEECROFT: After the Dodgers, who could ever love the Mets? It was unforgivable. They even had a really loud band of about eight or ten musicians who called themselves the Dodger Symphony, pronounced sym-PHO-ny. They would perform at Ebbets Field for all the games, got in for free and had their own reserved row of seats. They played very loud. Not very well, but very loud.

Q: For high school you went off to Hotchkiss?

BEECROFT: I went to Hotchkiss in my sophomore year, yes.

Q: What was that about?

BEECROFT: Well, as I said, my Dad was the first in his family to go beyond high school, and here he was in the rather environment of White and Case, surrounded by lawyers who virtually without exception had gone to Yale. Hotchkiss was primarily a Yale feeder school at the time. That was beginning to break down by the time I got there, but it was still the case to a certain extent. One of the Partners mentioned to my Dad that he would be happy to recommend me for Hotchkiss. After Dad and I got over the initial shock, we drove up to Lakeville, Connecticut and visited the school. There's a postcard on the cabinet right there - this absolutely fantastic campus with a faculty that would have done a small college proud. The three years that I spent there changed my life. At the outset, it was traumatic. I had never been away from home without my parents, except to go to a Methodist summer camp elsewhere in New Jersey. But once I got over it, it just stretched my universe beyond anything I could have imagined. Like so many other people who went to a school of that caliber, college was something of an anticlimax.

Q: Oh, it was, I went to Kent for four years.

BEECROFT: Oh, excellent.

Q: Actually when I went as an enlisted man in the air force, basic training was a breeze because what I'd been through, we all worked our way and we had to keep our rooms clean.

BEECROFT: Absolutely.

Q: How did you find, what courses kept you going there?

BEECROFT: Again, history. I had a master they were called masters - named George Milmine, who was a dollar-a-year man.

Q: You better explain what a dollar-a-year man is.

BEECROFT: It means that he had sufficient family wealth so that he accepted a dollar a year as a salary.

Q: This was during the war?

BEECROFT: This was in 1955, '56. He was getting by very well on a dollar a year. He and his wife had a lovely house looking out on the lake next to the school. He took us through Greek history, Roman history, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, right up to Napoleon, but his passion was the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe. He would stand up and button only the bottom button on his three-button tweed coat, so that it would bow out and he would seem to loom over you. I'll never forget his rich bass voice. He would say: "Men," - at that time Hotchkiss was still an all-boy school - "the next time you're in Chartres" - of course none of us had ever been there - "park your Maserati by the side of the road, leave your blonde in the car and go look at the flying buttresses. Observe the flying buttresses, they're the seminal European contribution to modern architecture." And he had a pile of postcards on his desk from generations of students, and all they had the same unfinished phrase on them: "The next time you're in Chartres..." George Milmine and people like him opened the door. He had this passion, and he shared it.

There were others. Peter Beaumont, a Norman Englishman, was my French master. When I got to Penn I spoke French as well as some of the teachers. And Charles Berry, the German master. At Penn, I taught both languages. These were just superb teachers. The English master was a man named Richard Gurney, who never had a pipe out of his mouth and went fly fishing on weekends. He opened the doors to English literature from Shakespeare to the present. His classes on Thoreau were worth the tuition all by itself. Amazing people.

Q: I take it, too that you got a very good grounding in writing?

BEECROFT: Yes. You were expected to frame a thesis, argue it persuasively, and carry your point. What with the writing, debating and constant pressure, this was not gentle encouragement. The pressure to perform was constant. It was very much sink or swim, and a lot of people sank. When I arrived as a Lower Misophomore - we had a class of 97 people. By the time we graduated, I'd say fully a quarter had washed out. Only some, not all, were replaced.

Q: Extracurricular activities?

BEECROFT: Mainly singing. I sang with the Hotchkiss Glee Club. We had a terrific director who is still alive and still directing church choirs. Albert Sly. He was also the organist for the school chapel. He managed to have us, I would say, punching above our weight. We sang at the Hartford Spring Choral Festival Honegger's King David, Handel's Messiah at Bushnell Hall. Things like that stick with you.

Q: Oh, yes. You were at Hotchkiss from what year to what year?

BEECROFT: I entered the school as a lower misophomorph in 1955, and graduated in 1958.

Q: Did the outside world intrude there? I mean this is '55 to '58. You had Sputnik and you had the Cold War was going on.

BEECROFT: And the second Eisenhower election. The outside world intruded only in spotty and unpredictable ways. You mentioned Sputnik. Yes Sputnik was talked about. Of course, students had no TV's, and not many masters did. We weren't even allowed radios! We could have a phonograph, but it couldn't have a radio built into it. I remember one kid was almost kicked out in senior year because he found a way to transmit radio signals through the radiator pipes. He called it Radio Free Hotchkiss. We all went out and bought loudspeakers, just the speakers, and if you hooked the wires up to the radiator just right you could get this scratchy sound. That was really pushing it at Hotchkiss in those days. But, yes, the Sputnik was topical, because a few of the masters - they weren't called teachers then, they were masters - had TVs.

Q: Well, were you getting news or was the New York Times or Time Magazine?

BEECROFT: Yes, that was the only way to stay current. You'd usually find a guy here or there who was subscribing to the Times or getting Newsweek or Time, but that was about it. We were intentionally cloistered. We were not encouraged to go out and inform ourselves in ways that weren't controlled by the faculty. It was a very paternalistic era. The term in loco parentis was seriously applied. You remember.

Q: Oh, yes, when I was at Kent it was run by Episcopal monks. We had a dance our senior year, and that was it. We weren't allowed to go across the river into the town of Kent.

BEECROFT: You couldn't go into town?

Q: No.

BEECROFT: Wow.

Q: I mean we had.

BEECROFT: That's even more stringent than Hotchkiss. We were allowed to walk into to Lakeville on Saturdays, but if you've ever been to Lakeville, don't blink or you'll miss it. There wasn't that much there when you got there.

Q: No, but it was a different period. Of course you got a damn good education.

BEECROFT: Yes, sir.

Q: There wasn't much time to mess around.

BEECROFT: No and I found that when I got to the University of Pennsylvania, I was very well informed, also from the point of view of current events, because what they spent their time doing at Hotchkiss was giving you the critical faculties to do it yourself. For me it was a - you can imagine the contrast, going from Passaic Valley High School to the Hotchkiss School. It was an adjustment, but in retrospect it was the best thing that ever happened to me.

Q: Well, then you're graduating in '58 from Hotchkiss?

BEECROFT: Right.

Q: Hotchkiss points towards Yale, what happened to you?

BEECROFT: Frankly, I didn't want to go there. I didn't like Yale. I'd visited it and been interviewed. I didn't like the environment. I didn't like the attitude, which I found to be smug and a bit arrogant. And I wanted to be in a big city. Hotchkiss was the antithesis of a big city environment. I also wanted to dabble in music. Penn had and still has a very good music program. So in the fall of '58, I found myself a music major at the University of Pennsylvania, at a time when it was very much an urban campus. I don't know if you know the campus?

Q: I don't know the campus.

BEECROFT: It has been transformed since those days and is really beautiful. Streets have been closed off. It's as beautiful a city campus as you'll find anywhere. But at that time the trolley cars ran right through the middle of the campus. It was ugly - alleys and grimy neighborhoods. But it was a city. I've never regretted going to Penn; quite the contrary. I met my wife there, and our daughter graduated from Penn in 1996. Penn and Philadelphia have been very good to me.

Q: How did your father the Wall Street banker feel about a music major at Penn?

BEECROFT: Somewhat befuddled. It wasn't what he had in mind. It's funny. I guess at least some children always resist their parents. That's probably an understatement. Dad trained me to think like a lawyer and to take notes like a lawyer and not to take things at face value like a lawyer, but I never never for a minute thought of going to law school. Call it rebellion if you will, but the ironic thing is that I ended up doing more negotiating than he ever did. Well, we can come back to that. Much later in my life, his life and mine, he came to Paris to visit us when I was assigned to the Embassy there. And he said to me at one point, "You know, I didn't know what you were doing and I didn't know whether you knew what you were doing, but it all seems to have worked out all right." That meant a lot to me. He was a fine man.

Q: Did you finish with the music or what happened?

BEECROFT: No. Language happened. I discovered first of all that if you're not going to be the world's best musician, you might as well enjoy the music without doing something that is going to frustrate the hell out of you. Because of the grounding I'd gotten at Hotchkiss in French and German, I soon discovered that I was maxing both those courses at Penn. So, in my second year I transferred to a French major and never looked back. I spent my junior year at the Sorbonne and at the Goethe-Institut in Munich and then came back and finished my B.A. at Penn. After that first year, I went in the direction of foreign languages and cultures and never looked back.

Q: A French major, was this pretty much rooted in the French classics or were you getting something about France today or France then?

BEECROFT: Frankly, as an undergraduate, if you went much beyond the language or a course or two in the culture you were free to take whatever you wanted, and I did. I took Russian language and history. I took some economics courses and barely escaped alive. Math is not my strong suit. Penn was very loose and very liberal in the best sense. So, you know, I stayed with it and I had excellent teachers, but frankly they weren't as good as the ones I'd had at Hotchkiss on the language side. In the summer of '60 I was working in a radio station in New York, WBAI, Pacifica Foundation.

Q: Was that at that time sort of a left-wing organization?

BEECROFT: Oh, very much. But I worked on classical music programming, not politics.

Q: Then, too, it certainly is now.

BEECROFT: Oh, yes. This was before the great upheavals of the '60s, but the Beatniks had arrived and it was very interesting. I also had a classical program on the University of Pennsylvania radio station, WXPB-FM, which actually had quite an audience in Philadelphia. Andrea Mitchell and I did the news together. We were both students, and are still friends. Anyway, I was acting as an informal guide in New York for American Field Service students - foreigners who had spent a year in U.S. high schools and were on their way home. They had a few days in New York before going home. Several of them said: "Come see us sometime." So the wheels started turning. I went up to the French Cultural Center, on Fifth Avenue near the Metropolitan Museum, and expressed interest in doing a summer course in France the following next summer. This was August. So the woman behind the desk says, "Well you can still go this year if you want, because our universities don't start until October." So the light bulb went on. This was long before the era of e-mails. I sent an application off to the Sorbonne, and I got an acceptance letter back within two weeks. I'll never forget - it was sitting on the dining room table in Little Falls, and my mother said to me, "Well, what have you gone and done now?" It helped a lot when my parents heard that the tuition at the Sorbonne was zero. Within a month I found myself on the French liner Flandre, headed for le Havre. That year in France basically put me on the path that I've been following ever since.

Q: You were in France when, what was the year?

BEECROFT: I was in France '60 to '61, with the exception of the winter semester when I was in Munich. That was at the height of the Algerian war and there were plastic bombs going off in the Latin Quarter, so it was a very interesting time to be there.

Q: What was happening at the Sorbonne? Were you sort of in with the student groups or were you off to one side?

BEECROFT: I wouldn't say that I was fully in, but I was a lot more interested in events than a number of other foreign students. I was enrolled in the Cours de Civilisation Française, and it was for foreigners. Because I spoke decent French, I didn't have to worry so much about the language aspect. I spent a lot of time talking to young people and learning what it was like to be a Frenchman in a time of crisis. It was a fantastic experience. Of course they were all out demonstrating. The Embassy had strongly warned American students about doing likewise because we might get hurt, arrested or expelled. But I will never forget, I don't know the date anymore, it must have been the spring of '61, when some French paratroop units in Algeria decided they were going to invade Paris and depose de Gaulle. Imagine: the French army decides to invade Paris, like the Commune. Michel Debré was the Prime Minister, and he got on the radio - this was so France and urged the Parisians to drive out on the road from Orly Airport into town, this was before Charles de Gaulle Airport existed, and create a traffic jam, because Paris was defenseless. The Army was in Algeria. The government really thought their number was up. But the paratroopers never came. So it was at times quite a suspenseful experience being in Paris. I also had plenty of chances to travel. My first day trip was to Chartres. I sent my own postcard to George Milmine.

Q: Did you work, where did you live? Was it with a French family or?

BEECROFT: I found a little flat at the corner of the rue Soufflot and the rue Saint-Jacques, very near the Pantheon. It was great. I could be a bachelor, I had total freedom and it was right in the middle of things. There was a police station across the street, and there were always two guys out front with submachine guns, standing behind concrete barriers because there was always the risk of plastic explosives being thrown at them.

Q: You're on the Left Bank there?

BEECROFT: Oh, yes.

Q: Did you get a feel for the French students' experience and the American students' experience? Compare and contrast, I'm so used to saying.

BEECROFT: Yes, compare and contrast. I found the French students to be terribly dronelike. There wasn't a lot of energy. It was very dogged. Except for this political commitment that some of them had. Maybe that's what it was all focused on, but it seemed to me they saw themselves as part of an age-old cycle of getting on the right rung of the right ladder and going up that ladder. You either went to Sciences Po or you went to the *École des Mines* or whichever of the *Grandes Écoles* you had to go to get the job that would put you in clover for the rest of your life. It was all very stylized, almost a caricature.

Q: Was there much sympathy for the army or was there sympathy for the Algerian cause?

BEECROFT: There was some timid sympathy for the Algerian cause on the left, but not as much as you might have expected, because Algeria had been French for 150 years and everyone agreed that Algeria was part of what they call the *Métropole*. This wasn't like Vietnam, which had been a French colony. Algeria was French - like Corsica in many ways. So you never knew what reaction you were going to get. If they had relatives in Algiers, you would get one reaction. If they didn't, or if they thought Algeria was an albatross, you'd get a different reaction, but it not directly related to one's place on the political spectrum. The Algeria crisis was a terrible shock for the French. France in 1960 was a country that in 20 years had lost to the Germans, lost to the Vietnamese and now was losing to the Algerians, so there was this real sense of "Are we truly a second-rate power, are we on our way out?" That's why it was no surprise when de Gaulle came back to power, because he had the arguments. He was very clever because he had not tipped his hand as to what course he would take - whether he was going to fight to keep Algeria or not. All he said was "Frenchmen, Frenchwomen: I have understood you." Brilliant. Of course his decision was: Algeria's a dead letter, let's get rid of it.

Q: Because when he went to Algiers he said, "I am with you" to the crowd, but he wasn't.

BEECROFT: Yes. He wasn't. That was a purely tactical statement on his part. Of course, he became the person the French of Algeria tried to kill.

Q: Here you are a kid from Little Falls, New Jersey, at Hotchkiss, the University of Pennsylvania and probably the first time you've ever run across honest to God devout communists. Did you get any feel, I mean the French Communist Party had a reputation of being very subservient. Did you get a feel for this?

BEECROFT: Well, sometimes you'd talk with somebody who would really be a Russophile, or I should say a Sovietophile. This was the communist party of George Marchais. You'd talk to some of these people in the student cafeteria and they would give you the entire line, American imperialists, NATO is your tool for domination...and of course this was also the time of the Bay of Pigs. My goodness, there was a lot of triumphalism about the black eye we got from Castro at the Bay of Pigs. Sure, this was an eye-opener because they didn't see us as we saw ourselves at all. The only place I'd been outside of the United States before that was Canada, and a week in Puerto Rico with the Penn Glee Club. That doesn't really count. We did sing for Pablo Casals in San Juan, which was nice, but nothing to compared to this. I will never forget standing at the railing of the Flandre, watching the lights of Long Island fade, and I felt a bit smug. I spoke French, didn't I? So went into the ship's movie theater and they were showing a Eddie Constantine gangster film, with no subtitles. I must have understood every tenth word. It was all Parisian slang. I thought my God, can I still swim to shore? My first week in Paris, I ordered a steak with a glass of milk to go with it. The waiter laughed. I never did that again. In those days, no one in France had ever heard of ketchup, let alone McDonalds. It was still a very different culture. Looking back on it, I really took a leap in the dark.

Q: Yes. Was it the time when, you were speaking French, but was it a time when the French had developed a reputation of being very nasty to foreigners? That's gone now.

BEECROFT: That's right.

Q: I remember that.

BEECROFT: They were darned ugly sometimes, but you know what saved it? It didn't dawn on me at first, but rather in 1962 when I came back to France for graduate studies in Strasbourg. I realized that it's not the French; it's the Parisians. Like it's not the Americans, it's the New Yorkers. I would see Alsatian friends coming back from a weekend in Paris and cursing the damned Parisians, who mocked their "German" accents. The Parisians are equal opportunity when it comes to this. It doesn't matter if you're a foreigner or not - if you're not from Paris, you're fair game. But you're right. They have mellowed. Even the signs in the Métro are now also in English.

Q: Well, then you came back, I assume you got credit for this?

BEECROFT: I got full credit. That was a leap in the dark, too because at that point study overseas was not so common and the University of Pennsylvania had no formal arrangements. Just before I left for Paris, I went down to Philadelphia and explained that I had been accepted in at the Sorbonne, and the Penn people said, "Well, when you come back, bring whatever documentation you have and we'll see if we can give you any credit." I never told my parents that. I came back nearly a year later with two diplomas from the Sorbonne and a diploma from Munich and they gave me full credit for both schools.

Q: How did you find Munich, again, a little compare and contrast.

BEECROFT: Well, first of all, Munich in the early 1960s was still a city with a lot of ruins. It had not completely recovered from World War II. Today it's one of the wealthiest cities in the world, but at that point you really had the feeling that the war wasn't that far behind. It was winter. You could smell the soft coal burning in a thousand stoves and furnaces. That's what people burned and it has that distinctive smell. Munich was nevertheless a beautiful though somewhat melancholy place. It was a totally different Europe from Paris. At that time, unlike now, when you crossed the Rhine Bridge at Strasbourg you were going between two countries that had known nothing but war or tense relations with each other for about a century and a half, and you really felt it. There were still fortifications on the French bank of the Rhine at Strasbourg. Crossing the Rhine bridge to Kehl was quite an effort. There were a lot of old prewar cars on the road in Germany then, and some horsecars. Munich was, as I say, somewhat melancholy, but very beautiful where it wasn't bombed. The Bavarian countryside between Munich and the Austrian border is a place I'm still a total sucker for. When I was serving later in Bonn, my wife and children and I would go down to Garmisch or Berchtesgaden or Oberammergau, and you know, it's the Julie Andrews cliché ½, but it doesn't matter, it's so beautiful.

Q: Oh, yes. Well, then, back to Penn. By this time you're getting a degree in French.

BEECROFT: I got my B.A. in French in June 1962.

Q: So, what did this prepare you for?

BEECROFT: It prepared me to be a teacher, which is what I thought I was going to be, but because Europe had really hit me between the eyes, I knew I wanted to do some graduate work first. I knew I wanted to go back to France, but I also knew that I wanted a different France and because of the fact that I also had German, I chose Strasbourg, and again, dumb luck, it turned out to be two of the best years of my life. I taught there. I taught American Civilization in a French Lycée and earned some money that way. I studied linguistics and phonetics at the University of Strasbourg. I also sang in the Strasbourg Opera Chorus - everything from Mozart's Requiem to Carmina Burana, also Wagner. Did you know there's a chorus in die Götterdämmerung? It's the only opera in the Ring Cycle that has a chorus. Not a long one, but there is one. I loved Strasbourg - just loved it. My daughter subsequently studied there.

Q: I want to go back just a bit. During the election of 1960 did you get involved? So many did at one time or the other, this was the Kennedy-Nixon one.

BEECROFT: I was in Europe that fall, so basically we watched it, but it wasn't as easy then to get information as it is now. I had a short-wave radio. I was able to listen to Voice of America, but the first real exposure I had to Jack Kennedy was when he came to Paris.

Q: Well, he said Jackie Kennedy went to Paris and he came along with her.

BEECROFT: "I'm the man who escorted Mrs. Kennedy to Paris." I stood on a bridge and watched him and Jackie and de Gaulle go right underneath in an open car. We were all fascinated with this man. There was a feeling that a page had turned. Coming back in the summer of '61 meant that I was just in time to watch John Glenn shoot for space. You had a feeling that we were pulling up our socks and that the world was changing, the new frontier. Then in the fall of '63 I was - I'll never forget it - on the stage of the Strasbourg Opera rehearsing for Carmina Burana when a big old Alsatian man came in and said in the local dialect, "Mr. Kennedy has been shot." Everyone just went home. I was the only non-Frenchman. We all just said goodbye and went home, to be by the television or radio and follow events. People would come up to you on the street in Strasbourg and express condolences as if he had been a relative. De Gaulle flew to Washington to march in the funeral cortege. That was an awful time the only time, with the exception of September 11, 2001, when the French were so open in expressing solidarity with us.

Q: What was Strasbourg like when you were there?

BEECROFT: Delightful. It has an almost perfect European balance. The cultural life is very active. The Strasbourg Opera is excellent; it was conducted by Richard Strauss under the Kaiser. So is the Strasbourg Philharmonic. And it has all those small museums. Strasbourg still feels as if it is right on the cusp. You find excellent beer and excellent wine. You hear French music and German music, both classical and popular. And the architecture - I did a lot of hiking in the countryside - those little half-timbered villages, just breathtakingly beautiful. There's a locally famous story about Alsace. In the 17th century, Alsace applied for membership as a Swiss canton. The Swiss, being no fools, took one look at its geographical situation, a kind of thumb between France and Germany, and said no thanks. A few years later, Louis XIV is riding along the crest of the Vosges Mountains, gazes down on the verdant Alsatian plain, and exclaims, "Ah, ce beau jardin!" And Alsace is swallowed up. Ever since, it has been on a pendulum. I had friends (remember this was the 1960's) whose birth certificates were bordered by swastikas and had a nice picture of Adolf Hitler on them. They had been christened Johann, and were now Jean. So it was the perfect town for me, and also a great student town.

Q: Were you feeling at that time - granted you were a student and teaching and all - but were you feeling any push towards Europeanization there or not?

BEECROFT: Yes, I'm glad you raised that. The Council of Europe was already there. The European Parliament was just coming into being. I visited the Council of Europe a lot because I had friends who were working there. Strasbourg's motto at the time was "The Capital of Europe." At that point it was no settled question that the capital of Europe would be in Brussels. There was a lot of competition among Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg. From a geographical point of view, Strasbourg makes good sense, and they have retained some of the European institutions to this day. There was a feeling that the way out of the bind of being right on the Franco-German fault line was to become European.

Q: The motto I take it was sort of "never again?"

BEECROFT: Well, not really because they felt at the end of the day they weren't the ones who were going to make the decision. "Let's find a way to make it never again" was more like it. To this day, if you go to Strasbourg you'll find people who talk about France - that is to say, France west of the Vosges - as "the Interior." They don't feel that they're totally part of France. There's a saying in Alsace that "Germany raped Alsace, but France seduced her." They like the French because the French by and large let them alone. The Germans kept trying to make it culturally German. It isn't. It's Alemanic - more Swiss than German, even the dialect. Laissez-faire is a French term. There's no German equivalent.

Q: When did something called diplomacy, the Foreign Service, come across your radar?

BEECROFT: I took the Foreign Service exam the first time at the U.S. Consulate General in Strasbourg, which at the time was a full-service post, issued visas and all of that. It doesn't anymore. Its sole job now is to observe and report on the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. I flunked. Frankly, I took it as a reaction to the Kennedy assassination. Many people of my generation felt the need to respond in some way, by joining the Peace Corps or in some other way. I knew the Consul General and several people Americans and FSN'on his staff. It was the first time I had gotten to know anything about the diplomatic profession. I'd visited the American Embassy in Paris as a student there, but rarely. Paris was the kind of place when you want to keep your distance from home. I didn't feel that way in Strasbourg. My second year there I lived right across the street from the Consulate on Avenue d'Alsace. It was easy to cross the street, and I got to know the people in the consulate pretty well.

Q: Do you remember anybody who was there at time?

BEECROFT: I remember one person so well that I can see his face but I cannot recall his name. I'll try.

Q: Yes, you can fill this in.

BEECROFT: There was also an American Cultural Center in Strasbourg. Sadly, all of this is gone. It was about three blocks away, across the street from the Grand Synagogue. Strasbourg is a town that has historically had a very significant Jewish community. There was an Alsatian immigrant, by the way, named Julius Marx, who later became known as Groucho. I used to go to the Cultural Center a lot because they had a really good LP record collection and I would borrow records. I still have a photograph of the window of the cultural center after the Kennedy assassination, with a photograph of JFK draped in black. It really it was a traumatic event around the world.

Q: Oh, yes. I was in Yugoslavia and all the Yugoslav flags flew at half mast.

BEECROFT: I didn't know that, wow.

Q: Yes. I remember driving through Tuzla a few months thereafter and there in a little street market were pictures surrounded in plastic of Kennedy.

BEECROFT: Yes. I came to know Tuzla well enough. Anyway, Strasbourg was my first exposure to the Foreign Service in any real way.

Q: Then in teaching how did you find French students?

BEECROFT: Awesome. Terrifying. I taught at the Lycée Fustel de Coulanges, which is - do you know Strasbourg?

Q: No I don't.

BEECROFT: It is physically attached to the cathedral. I used to commute to work by walking down the nave of the Strasbourg Cathedral! There's always one prestige lycée in any major French city, one that prepares a small number of young people of high school age to go on to the Grandes écoles the elite schools of France, mostly in Paris. These kids are called "hypokhâgnes" in their first year and "khâgnes" in their second and final year. No one seems to know where the term comes from. They were so well prepared. They knew all the facts. They were the perfect product of the French educational system. It was like talking to computers. They had it all in their memory banks and out it would come, but it had no context. It was just a marvelous collection of facts. I was teaching American civilization, but the stereotypes that they already had in place tended to override anything I could teach them. It was a remarkable lesson for me of the results of a totally centralized and highly judgmental pedagogical system. When I was just beginning at Fustel de Coulanges, another teacher commented to me with a smile that if the Ministry of Education in Paris had its way, every teacher in France would be on the same word of the same paragraph of the same page of the same book at the same millisecond, everywhere in the country.

Q: Well, did you find trying to teach American civilization were people saying the French equivalent of that's an oxymoron?

BEECROFT: That's right. Well, for one thing, I had friends who were majoring in English at the University. They were not allowed to use American English, which was not regarded as a subject, only a "dialect." Only British English was permitted, both spelling and pronunciation and so I had to remind my students that they were not to imitate my accent. But these same kids were fascinated by American movies and popular music. This was the early '60s, Elvis and the Kingston Trio, but to call it American culture, no. That's why they called my course American Civilization. The official view was that you can have civilization without culture.

Q: Did you find yourself sort of put in the position of trying to defend America or not or was it working?

BEECROFT: It was hard to resist the temptation, especially after the Kennedy assassination. You still hear the same criticisms and stereotypes. Texas, the gun culture. Dallas.

Q: Dallas being a, I'm not sure when that came, but it was an extremely popular serial almost soap opera about a wealthy Texan.

BEECROFT: That was on TV fifteen years later. They loved it. J.R.

Q: Places used to shut down in Europe.

BEECROFT: People were fascinated.

Q: You didn't invite people over on Dallas day.

BEECROFT: That's right. There's this love-hate sentiment. Somebody asked Colin Powell about U.S.-French relations not that long ago, and he came back with the perfect retort. He said, "The United States and France have been in marriage counseling for 225 years, and I think we'll stay that way."

Q: That really is true.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: Well, how long were you in France?

BEECROFT: Two years.

Q: Two years.

BEECROFT: In addition to the year in Paris.

Q: By this time we're talking about what, 1965?

BEECROFT: The summer of '64. I had to make a decision: stay on in Europe, perhaps permanently, or come home. Frankly and to my surprise, I was homesick for the U.S. I believe it still had something to do with the aftermath of Kennedy. I loved European culture, but the U.S. was my country. I came back in the summer of '64 and went back to UPenn (University of Pennsylvania) and began a Masters program in French, but I frankly never saw that as where I wanted to end up. It was just a logical follow-on to where I'd been and what I'd done. I figured that I could go back to Penn and earn some money as a Graduate Instructor and see what came along.

Q: Was there a significant other or anything like that?

BEECROFT: Not then, a year later.

Q: What about also did you get a feel for academic life? You know, many people say when you look at academic life, I want to be a professor or that, it has both its attractions and the negative side.

BEECROFT: You bet. It's a shark tank. It's not that different from any other bureaucratic organization, the Department of State included. It's just that it's in a much smaller, rarefied atmosphere. It's a fishbowl. At least in the Foreign Service we're spread all over the world. In a university you are right there in the pressure cooker. But I liked being on campus. I got my radio program back and I was doing things other than just teaching. That went on for a year and a half. Then two things happened in the fall of '65. The first was that I got a draft notice. We began to hear a lot about a place called Vietnam.

Q: Yes.

BEECROFT: My draft board was in Paterson, New Jersey. I was a graduate student and teacher, and they considered such people as draft dodgers by definition.

The second thing was that I met my future wife, Mette, almost at the same time. We were both graduate students in French. We spent a long day together administering Princeton graduate language exams. This was when reel-to-reel tape recorders were relatively new there were no audiocassettes - and this was an experimental program. We had a great time, and one thing led to another. I began looking for an alternative to going immediately on active duty. As luck would have it, I found a slot as a medic in an Army Reserve infantry unit located about two blocks from her house. She lived in a historic area of Philadelphia called Germantown. She was born there, but her father and mother were both Norwegian, first-generation Americans. Her father was a sea captain. Her mother was one of the first women to graduate from Oxford University. We were married on October 22, 1966. I'm sort of rambling here.

Q: That's all right. I think it's important to get the background of one's significant other as it were.

BEECROFT: I liked Scandinavia a lot. I was 5/5 in Danish, but never did serve in Scandinavia - State Department logic. We recently returned from Sarajevo via Norway. I speak passable Norwegian. She has six first cousins there, no family in the States. Anyway, back to the fall of '65. I joined a reserve unit a couple of blocks from Mette's home in Germantown. They made me a medical corpsman don't ask why - and I began going to drills. I was not activated until the summer of '67, so I had a considerable amount of time beginning to learn about the military before I ever went active. In the meantime I kept taking courses at Penn, and also began teaching more intensively. I continued teaching at Penn and also became an instructor at St. Joseph's University, which was then St. Joseph's College. Mette and I were married on October 22, 1966 in Philadelphia. It was a great wedding. We had a honeymoon in Jamaica. Then I was notified that I would be activated for basic training in July 1967. So Mette and I, having only been married only a few months decided to do something really wacky. We flew off to Norway, spent a week or so with her family, then flew on to Helsinki and bought a Volvo 144, which was a brand new model then, and drove it into the Soviet Union. We drove from Helsinki through Vyborg, to Moscow, Novgorod, Kalinin, Klin - where Tchaikovsky's villa is - Moscow, Orel, Kursk, Kharkov, Kiev, L'vov and over the Carpathians and out through what was then Czechoslovakia.

Q: Did you have problems doing that?

BEECROFT: We had prearranged it all with the Soviet travel agency Intourist in New York. We had problems anyway, but they could have been a lot worse. There was always a hotel room and there was always a guide. That was interesting, too because some of the guides were actually not fervent communists. One of them was a practicing Christian who stuck her neck out by taking us to a functioning church. Russia was a great adventure. We came back from Russia in July of '67 and within a week or two I was at Fort Polk, Louisiana. Quite a contrast.

Q: What did they do with you at Fort Polk?

BEECROFT: I was given basic infantry training with an MOS - method of service - of medical corpsman. For six weeks in the late summer and early fall of 1967 I wore a steel pot and ran through the swamps. It was the second most important education I ever got after Hotchkiss. You really learn how to not only get along with, but also to give mutual support to, people who are as about as different from you as they can be. I don't feel nostalgia about it, but I do feel a certain attachment because it was mind-blowing in so many ways. Nowadays we might say transformational. This was a reserve unit, now so we were slightly older than the norm. The drill sergeants clearly considered us as the ones they didn't have to worry about too much, because there was another company that was from the slums of Cleveland and they were trouble. We just kept our noses clean and did what we were ordered do.

We had a great Senior Drill Sergeant, his name was Johnny Harris. Some things you never forget. You never forget your senior drill sergeant. You never forget your dog tag number, either. Mine was ER13987134.

Q: ER21270823.

BEECROFT: There you go. You never forget. Johnny Harris was a tall, tough African-American who later went off to Vietnam. I've looked for his name on the Wall; it's not there, so I guess he got back. Names of some fellow trainees are on the Wall, though. Sergeant Harris taught us more about leadership and survival than anybody else I've ever known. I would wager that he saved more than a few of his men's lives. Wherever Johnny Harris is, God bless him. That was Fort Polk in 1967. You got to know a lot of rattlesnakes on first-name terms.

Q: What happened to you then?

BEECROFT: In early 1968, I went to Fort Sam Houston, Texas for Advanced infantry training. That was some contrast. Tree-lined parade grounds, beautiful residences for officers and senior noncoms, sort of like this place.

Q: I'm interviewing now, it's Fort McNair.

BEECROFT: There you go. Well, Fort Sam Houston was the home of Brooke Army Medical Center, and I was training to be a medic. We learned how to give each other shots, how to staunch a sucking chest wound, how to take and give blood and morphine, how to sever a limb if necessary, how to shout "I don't make house calls" when you're under fire on a beach. There's a lot of gallows humor among medics. Then my active duty was extended by six weeks, because at that point in the war they were so short of sergeants that they ordered trainees with college degrees to stay on and actually do some of the training as temporary sergeants. We wore purple helmets and were called "Grapeheads." I came back to Philadelphia in February 1968, resumed my teaching and waited to be sent to Vietnam. Then on March 31st - one of those dates that stays with you - Lyndon Johnson went on television to make a major announcement. My wife and I sat on the bed and watched. The scuttlebutt was that he would announce an increase in our Vietnam troop strength from 500,000 to 750,000. I had my duffel bag out and ready to pack. Instead, he said: "I have determined that I will not run for president in 1968." He said nothing about troop strength. I looked at Mette and said, "I don't think I'm going." I never did.

Q: Had the Foreign Service been hovering around?

BEECROFT: I took the exam the second time in the summer of 1967, after the Russia trip and just before going to Fort Polk. After that, with everything else that was going on, I sort of forgot about it. Some time later, I got a letter congratulating me for passing the Foreign Service exam - you will come and take your oral, blah, blah. This must have been in the spring of '68. So I went to New York and took my oral at USUN. I still remember one of the interviewers, a senior FSO named Abram Manell. He was a very impressive man, and I was scared. I'd been reading the New York Times and I'd heard rumors about loose doorknobs and other things they did to unsettle you.

Q: Dribble glass. No ashtray.

BEECROFT: Yes, right. But there was none of that. What he did do, he asked me a question that was right in my wheelhouse, because it had to do with education. "A wealthy philanthropist comes to you and says that wants to establish scholarships for exchange students from the Soviet Union. What do you do?" I said I saw a potential opportunity. If you can influence young people by giving them the perspective that there is more to life than the communist way of life, why not try it? So Manell says, "You go to the Soviets with this offer and they respond by saying 'We don't want your lousy scholarships.' What do you do then?" I replied that I'd say "Thank you very much, no one is forcing them on you; we'll be happy to offer them to the Chinese." He liked that answer. I passed the oral.

Then, in a classic State Department case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing, FSI wrote to inform me that there were no A-100 openings, and that by the time there were, my eligibility period would have run out. So Mette and I sort of gulped, looked at each other and began thinking about what we were going to do with the rest of our lives. We decided to contest this. We sat down and co-wrote a letter back to FSI along the following lines: "I've been thinking about your reply and it seems to me that if you don't have an opening now - especially since I've been on active military duty and therefore in government service the lack of A-100 openings is your problem, and I should not be penalized for it. Could you please reconsider?" I figured well, that's the last I'm going to hear from them. A couple of months later, a reply arrived in the mail, saying in effect: "We've been considering your situation and we agree with your argument. Therefore, we are putting you on leave without pay until you begin the A-100 course." Having never been on active duty! I was later told by John Stutesman - I don't know if you remember John Stutesman -

Q: I know John, yes.

BEECROFT: - that my case was so unusual that they later decided they would never again put anyone on leave without pay who had never been on active Foreign Service duty.. I was on leave without pay until April 1971, when I started the A-100 course. Basically I got to tell the Department when I was coming in! Our first child, Christopher, was born in November of '68, then Mette finished up her Ph.D. I went into the A-100 course in 1971, but my service computation date still says 1969.

Q: Well, I think this is probably a good place to stop.

BEECROFT: Okay.

Q: All right. Today is the 29th of September, 2004. Bob, you came in in 1971, what was your class? I mean I assume you went into the A-100 course?

BEECROFT: That's right. I was in the A-100 course. That was an interesting time because so many FSO's were going to Vietnam. In fact there was a sort of legendary class, I can't remember anymore which it was, I think it was the 89th class. It was called the "Fighting 39th," because every single one of them was sent to Vietnam. For whatever reason, not many in our group went to Vietnam.

Q: Vietnamization had started and we were beginning to pull out, although we had a significant cadre of people there. Well, what, can you kind of characterize or talk about some of the people or the types of people, race, gender and all of where your class was coming from?

BEECROFT: Overwhelmingly WASP and male. There was only one African-American in the group. There was one Hispanic who later became an ambassador in Latin America. So, pretty much the old stereotype.

Q: Women?

BEECROFT: Two or three.

Q: This is before sort of the gender issue had been resolved, but anyway work with it.

BEECROFT: You're really opening doors that haven't been opened in a long time. My wife Mette had just finished her Ph.D., and someone asked her what good she thought the doctorate would ever do. This was just at the beginning of the period when women were no longer rated along with their husbands in efficiency reports, which were then called OERs. This drove my first employer crazy because he liked the contributions she was making and wanted to give her credit in my OER. In my first efficiency report in the Foreign Service, he actually declared that "Mr. Beecroft sets a fine table." Of course, I did no such thing. But he couldn't mention her.

Q: Well, now, what degree field was your wife in?

BEECROFT: Ph.D. in French, University of Pennsylvania.

Q: Now, when you came in, did you have any area, any place or thought in mind of either specialty or a geographical area?

BEECROFT: I had a little of both - Europe and political-military. Europe because I had returned from studying and teaching there only five years earlier. Political-military because I loved history and was still in the reserves. It fascinated me, how all of this had played out during Vietnam. And there were just not that many people in the Foreign Service who had had direct involvement in or been part of the military, especially in that Vietnam period when there had been such polarization. In fact, I think some people joined the Foreign Service so they could find a way out of the draft. When our A-100 course was drawing to its close, we went over to USIA. Remember, it used to be at 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue? They had a plaque by the entrance that said "Telling America's Story to the World." People sometimes replaced the T with an S - Selling America's Story to the World. We were over there for a briefing on USIA's mission and activities. I knew nothing about the Foreign Service really, about the way the Department worked, but I had heard somebody say, if you really want to get the job you want, it isn't enough just to fill out a bid list. You have to go lobby a little. Frankly, I found the briefing at USIA terribly boring. So I played hooky, walked over to the Department and went up to the European Bureau. By sheer happenstance, I found a door marked EUR/RPM. It stands for regional political-military affairs, but RPM is first and foremost the NATO affairs office. I went in, blissfully naïve, and introduced myself to a couple of people there. You may remember one of them - E. J. Beigel, something of a legend. I said, "I'm a junior officer. I'm going to be assigned overseas soon. Is there anything that might be coming up?" He said, "Well, we're looking for a Deputy Political Advisor at SHAPE." He asked me a few things about my background, and I told him I was very interested and would put the job down at the top of my bid list. I got the job. That summer Mette and our three-and-a-half-year-old son found ourselves on the way to Belgium.

Q: While you were in the class, was there much discussion about Vietnam, should we have gone in, how we were doing and all that? It wasn't until '75 that the whole thing collapsed, but at that time, were you getting either from your own classmates or from people that were talking to you, any feel about it?

BEECROFT: Well, I think by that time exhaustion had set in. I can't remember anybody in our class who was an eloquent defender of our presence in Vietnam. I think there was a general belief that Vietnam had been a mistake, but it was a situation we were having a lot of trouble getting out of. It certainly was not a big bone of contention in the class.

Q: How did you get to Belgium, were liners still going or did you fly?

BEECROFT: No. We flew to Brussels. I knew Belgium a little. It had never been a country that appealed to me much. That soon changed, and of course we were not in Brussels. We were met at the airport by my boss's Belgian driver and immediately drove south to Mons/Casteau, just north of the French border. This was before the autoroute, the superhighway, was built, so we went through a number of towns, down the old Roman and medieval highway between Brussels and Mons - Brussels and Paris if you kept going. Mons is the last major town before you cross the border into France. After de Gaulle expelled SHAPE from Paris in 1966, it had ended up as close to the French border as it could be without being in France. The Belgians had an old airbase in Casteau, which they had put at the disposal of NATO. When I got there in '71, much of it was still a muddy field. It rains a lot in southern Belgium. There was also I think a very widespread belief at SHAPE that this was all temporary and one day everyone was going to move back to Paris. Of course, that never happened.

Q: What about, in Mons was there any residue of the great battles of World War I?

BEECROFT: All the battlefields were marked. We knew where the famous canal was. In fact I used to drive over it every day on my commute from Mons up the hill to Casteau.

Q: Canal de Mons-Condé ½ or something like that?

BEECROFT: That's right Canal de Mons-Condé ½, just north of the town and south of SHAPE itself. Of course, you weren't that far from Ypres. People tended to pay a lot less attention to the battles of World War I than the battle of World War II, such as the German breakthrough at Sedan. Personally, I was fascinated.

SHAPE was a huge headquarters. Here I was - just joined the Foreign Service, never served in an embassy or consulate. Instead, it was a two-man post: a senior American diplomat, Ambassador Eugene V. McAuliffe, and me. We're it. Our office was called INTAF, which stands for International Affairs, right down the hall from SACEUR, the Supreme Allied Commander, General Andrew Jackson Goodpaster. He had a brilliant military career, received two Purple Hearts in World War II, then served as the staff secretary and confidant to President Eisenhower in the White House. After his time at SHAPE, he voluntarily gave up a star to become Commandant of West Point. He was a West Point graduate himself, of course. They wanted somebody to restore its reputation after a major student cheating scandal, and he took the job and did brilliantly.

Q: I had met him very briefly when I went to Saigon I remember. He is sort of a legendary man.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: What were you picking up, in the first place you were there from '71 to when?

BEECROFT: To '73.

Q: '73. What were you picking up regarding the NATO forces at that time? This was a time wasn't it when our military was under great strain to put it mildly I think.

BEECROFT: Yes, there was a lot of concern because of course this was early in the détente era. The military were very much focused on the possibility of a full-scale nuclear war with the Soviet Union. There was a lot of concern on the part of the European allies that the Americans were aiming at the wrong target by focusing on Vietnam. They wanted us to stay massively committed in Europe. They considered that we were frittering away our strength on the periphery instead. They had also heard reports, which were accurate, of serious morale problems and operational difficulties inside the U.S. military.

Q: What were you picking up there of the Soviet threat?

BEECROFT: Two words that summed up the whole thing were "Fulda Gap." People at SHAPE had nightmares about massive Soviet armored forces crashing through NATO's defenses there, in northern Bavaria, and heading for the Channel. Remember, it wasn't just the Soviet Union either. There was the entire Warsaw Pact that had to be taken into account. The East Germans were taken with great seriousness, because the East German military was considered very effective, the others less so.

Q: What was your boss, what's his name?

BEECROFT: McAuliffe. Eugene V. McAuliffe.

Q: McAuliffe. What was his background and how did he operate?

BEECROFT: Gene McAuliffe was a political-military expert and a Europeanist to his fingertips. He served in the Army in World War II, then became an FSO. His first job in the Foreign Service was as George S. Patton's political advisor, or POLAD. Can you imagine being George S. Patton's POLAD? He was a great Irish storyteller from the Boston suburbs. Gene would tell stories about arriving at SHAPE in France in 1944, when it was still SHAEF - Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force only to hear SACEUR, General Eisenhower say, "Okay, you look just like the kind of person I want to send out to advise Patton." Everyone was snickering, advise Patton? When McAuliffe arrived at Patton's headquarters, Patton said, "Well, I guess Ike must know what he's doing" and gave him a large black Packard sedan with a single word on the license plate: "Official." Patton directed him to drive around and report back on what he saw. So McAuliffe witnessed the closing stages of World War II from a black Packard. He spent a lot of time in EUR/RPM. He knew all the NATO issues. He came to SHAPE from an ambassadorship in Spain, and later became Ambassador to Hungary and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. He was quite a mercurial, hot-tempered Irishman, as hot as Goodpaster was cool. He knew how to relate to the military and had Goodpaster's respect and confidence. When you deal with the military, you must treat them as human beings and respect them as professionals. The Foreign Service tends to patronize them, and that's a mistake.

Q: Oh, a terrible mistake. Well, tell me, in the first place how did you react to getting this wet behind the ears junior officer because I would have thought that this would be a plum PM job that would come to somebody who had been on a couple of tours in Europe or something.

BEECROFT: The Deputy POLAD job at SHAPE was a great job for a junior FSO. I learned a lot and felt very fortunate to be there. Sadly, the Department later handed the slot over to the Pentagon, so from then on the Deputy POLAD at SHAPE was a U.S. military officer. But in my time it was a job for an O-6 or O-7. Frankly, it was a huge opportunity. After I had been there for a year or so, McAuliffe became the DCM at the U.S. Mission to NATO in Brussels and I became Acting POLAD to SACEUR for several months, as an O-7. Our Ambassador to NATO at the time was a certain Donald Rumsfeld. It took Washington quite a while to find a successor to McAuliffe. Ironically, I ended up writing Gene McAuliffe's efficiency report, which was signed Goodpaster without changes. I just wrote what I thought would do him the most good.

One of the best learning experiences I had there, both under McAuliffe and his eventual successor, Ted Long, was to go up to Brussels once a week and poke around. McAuliffe had an official black Plymouth sedan. His driver would take me to the Embassy and NATO headquarters at Evere, just outside the city. My job was to glean what intelligence I could as a lowly junior officer, and report back. I was inconspicuous enough so that I could occasionally pick up some interesting information.

Q: Which embassy?

BEECROFT: The U.S. Embassy to Belgium. Then I would go out to USNATO. McAuliffe called this "spying on the enemy," because there was, and still is, a certain amount of tension between SHAPE and NATO headquarters and between the POLAD at SHAPE and the people at NATO. I would check in with the Political Section at USNATO and talk with some of the people on the international side and get a sense of what was on their agendas. What was on their minds? What were their policy priorities? Were there changes in the works that hadn't been officially broached with SHAPE yet? I would take this back and brief McAuliffe and sometimes go with him to brief General Goodpaster. It was heady stuff for a junior officer.

Q: What about, I mean, NATO was always you've got all these countries, but particularly at that time you had the Turks and the Greeks.

BEECROFT: Correct.

Q: Who really spent most of their time arming against each other. I mean there are a lot of political booby traps everywhere you read, the cables, obviously were you reading the cables to your principal and pointing out here comes trouble and that sort of thing?

BEECROFT: Yes. I soon learned that for a junior officer one of the most important tasks is to read everything, and also to know where it is filed. We had a wonderful, very loud Foreign Service Secretary the term OMS didn't exist - named Mary Ann. You could hear her voice way down the hall. Sadly, Mary Ann became ill, and eventually it proved fatal. I ended up doubling as the de facto filer. We got the cables and reports from military channels and belatedly from civilian channels. I read through the stuff and would highlight it, pull out a dozen or so cables I thought McAuliffe would want to share with General Goodpaster or that I thought he should know about. It was a wonderful learning experience. Basically, in hindsight I was really cheeky. I didn't know much of anything. You just have to use your instinct, wing it and hope it works.

Q: Were you also playing sort of the mole going to the officers' mess listening to the gossip and bringing back?

BEECROFT: Not just the officers' mess. There was an O club, but there was also an NCO club. Having been both an NCO and an officer myself, I knew that the NCO club would have better food and a livelier atmosphere.

Q: That's a given.

BEECROFT: Yes. You could pick up a lot of stuff in both places. Because I had studied in Europe and spoke French, German and Danish, I got to know the other nationalities, starting with the Belgians and the French - because there were French there. One thing that was never talked about much was that there was a French military liaison mission at SHAPE, even though it was only a few years since the French had kicked SHAPE out of Paris. The French military were always more loyal to NATO than the civilians in Paris. General Goodpaster was political to the tips of his fingers. He kept the French account in his office. He knew the French Chief of Staff very well. He knew everyone who mattered at the French Defense Ministry. The lines never got cut.

Q: Did he visit Paris?

BEECROFT: Funny you should mention that, I hadn't thought of that in years. I heard that he used to dress as a civilian now and then and go down there.

Q: Well, I know later I talked, when I was in Naples, this was in the late '70s Admiral Crowell was the CINCSOUTH guy used to say that the French used to have naval maneuvers with the navy, but they were, I mean it was very close relations.

BEECROFT: The French military never wanted to get out of the game. Leaving the NATO integrated military structure was not a military decision. It was a purely political decision. Ever since then, right up to the present, it has been quite easy to work with the French military. The problem was not at the Ministry of Defense; it was at the Quai d'Orsay and the Matignon.

Q: That would be the?

BEECROFT: Presidency.

Q: Yes. Well, now, what I mean this is what five years, seven years after, well, no it was five years after leaving, you were saying that it was still considered to be sort of a temporary thing, but what were you picking up? Was there sort of a sigh when they were talking about the French? I mean I'm talking about really the French political position, the people there.

BEECROFT: No one understood why they had done it. No one could really see what was in it for them to expel NATO from Paris. After all, a French general commanded the central front of NATO. The French had a significant presence throughout the integrated military structure. After all, they were considered one of the victorious allies. They got there the hard way, but that's the fact. It didn't make sense from a military point of view, but it reflected de Gaulle's determination to rebuild France's self-confidence. It was also based on a visceral distrust of any alliance he couldn't control, especially when the Americans were in the lead. There's an anecdote about de Gaulle one day exclaiming in frustration, "Ah! If only I were the president of the United States." Well, he wasn't.

Q: How did you feel things integrated, the Germans, the British, Belgians, Dutch and others?

BEECROFT: This was a time when there was only one DSACEUR - Deputy Supreme Commander - and he was always British. This went back to the Eisenhower- Montgomery relationship. But there were the beginnings, just the beginnings, of German expressions of interest in the job, since they made the largest single military contribution to NATO after the United States. The eventual compromise that was reached well after my time was that there would be two DSACEURs (Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe), one German and one British. I believe they rotate now, alternately British or German.

Q: Was there a German-British problem at the time did you see?

BEECROFT: No, it was a little bit too soon. Willy Brandt was the chancellor. Brandt still had a visceral affection for the United States, which had been reinforced when Kennedy came to Berlin in 1963 and Brandt was mayor. At the same time, Brandt was intent on opening doors to East Germany, the GDR. There were plenty of British bases in Germany then, but there were the beginnings of concern in London, especially since the Brits hadn't yet made the fateful decision to take the plunge and join the EU.

Q: Was there concern at the time that you were picking up, I really that you were really at the end of the feeding chain.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: But concern that the Germans might make a deal for the unification of Germany that they'd be out, in other words, that they would go neutral that would really take the guts out of NATO.

BEECROFT: There may have been such concerns, but you're absolutely right that I was not in a position and certainly I was not at a level that would have allowed me to get into those sorts of high policy discussions. I may have heard things in corridors, but when it came to the military relationship, Germany was the perfect partner.

Q: But you were saying, here you were a junior officer equivalent to maybe a first lieutenant acting on behalf of a man who is equivalent to a two star general when your Polad was no longer there and I mean one just doesn't go into this job. Things, rank means a lot, who talks to you and all that. There must have been a diminution of what you could offer Goodpaster during this time.

BEECROFT: I got no guidance from Brussels or Washington, none at all. All I heard from RPM was "We are looking for a successor to Ambassador McAuliffe, keep up the good work and we'll let you know." So I decided that I would in all discretion try to give SACEUR the kind of information I knew he was getting from McAuliffe. Gene was a very open and transparent person. He sent in memos to SACEUR when issues came to his attention from Brussels or things popped up in cables that would turn on a red light that he thought SACEUR should know about. I did my best to do the same, in kind if not with the same authority. This went on for four months. My understanding is that the word finally went out from Goodpaster to Washington, Beecroft is giving me good insights, I'm pleased, but I need a senior replacement for McAuliffe. Periodically, he would call me in and we would talk. It was pretty humbling for a guy who had been a Spec 4 not many years before and never rose above the rank of First Lieutenant, but I just figured I'm not going to be doing this man any good by hunkering down and doing the minimum; I'll do my best to give him what I think he ought to get. I had just enough understanding of the political situation and the military side of it. Thank God I'd been in the army. I came out of it okay.

Q: Can you think of any of the issues that you would bring up?

BEECROFT: I remember one in particular that sounds kind of funny now. I got a request from him SACEUR day: he wanted to know what his responsibilities were, legal, constitutional and operational responsibilities, for the defense of Spitzbergen, also known as Svalbard - the islands between Norway's North Cape and the North Pole.

Q: They were kind of a big deal during World War II.

BEECROFT: Yes, they were. They remained a big deal because the sea lanes that Soviet submarines took out of Murmansk went right between Svalbard and the North Cape. That's a couple of hundred miles. Well, I began researching this. It was almost like a graduate student exercise. It turned out that Svalbard is a sovereign part of the kingdom of Norway, but that there were more Russians than Norwegians on Svalbard.

Q: Coal miners.

BEECROFT: "Coal." Apparently the quality of the coal is very poor, but it gave the Russians a pretext to stay there. The pretext based on the 1923 Treaty of Paris. That treaty gave sovereignty to Norway, but allowed any of about 20 treaty signatories to exploit it economically, which is why the Russians could have their coal miners up there. Another thing the treaty did was to declare Svalbard perpetually neutral territory. So, after I checked it out - I'm not a lawyer, but my father was and he influenced me - I sent a memo in SACEUR saying that in my view, he had no operational responsibility for Svalbard. He could not put any NATO soldiers there. He could not use it as a base of operations. That didn't seriously affect his NATO assets, which didn't need to land on Svalbard to cover the gap. Apparently it was the answer he was hoping for. I remember that because his questions were usually operational, yes, but with underlying political overtones. One thing this taught me was when you are a really successful general, you are always weighing the political implications of what you do. You're always factoring them in.

Q: How about the Norwegian component of NATO? Was this, did you consult with them or not?

BEECROFT: No. When you were working on the command corridor you did not go consulting around. You found another way to do it. If he had wanted a Norwegian opinion, he would have asked the Norwegians.

Q: Did anything change when you had the new POLAD came in?

BEECROFT: Well, for one thing I took a deep breath for the first time in about four months. I spent much of my last half-year at SHAPE breaking him in, because this was not a person who had a lot of NATO experience. He was a Latin America specialist named Theodore Long, Ted Long. He came from an ambassadorship in Colombia. I worked very closely with him and we bonded well. He had no ego problems and didn't mind asking questions. That was in the winter and spring of 1973, just before I left.

Q: Then where?

BEECROFT: To the last place I expected: Paris. Amazing story. I had met a guy at a reception in Washington before going out to NATO in 1971, a lawyer named Scott Custer. I did not know that I had made any kind of impression on him, but it turned out that Custer was the Executive Assistant to the Deputy Secretary of State, John N. Irwin II. Well, in 1973, Mr. Irwin was named U.S. ambassador of France. They were looking for a staff aide. Scott Custer remembered me. One day I got a phone call out of the blue: this is the office of the U.S. ambassador in Paris, and we're wondering if you would care to come here to be the Staff Aide to the Ambassador. Gulp. This took about two milliseconds to consider. That summer we were off to Paris.

Q: You were in Paris from when to when?

BEECROFT: '73 to '75.

Q: What was Ambassador Irwin like?

BEECROFT: He was an exceptionally kind, decent and upstanding individual, as well as subtle and smart on the issues. He had been Deputy Secretary of State during the first Nixon term, and was a major contributor to Nixon's campaigns. In early 1973 he became Ambassador to France. He was born in Keokuk, Iowa, where his family lived for generations. His grandfather was governor of Arizona Territory in the 1890's. They kept a souvenir - a ranch of about 200,000 acres outside of Prescott, which we later visited. He went to Yale Law School and had become a senior partner in a major firm in New York, to which he returned to afterwards. When he went off to Paris, he naturally assembled a front office team a team, and Scott Custer recommended me. So Mette, Christopher and I moved to Paris in the summer of 1973. It was my first assignment in an embassy. Gulp. The only embassy experience I had had was poking around the embassy in Brussels now and then, and that was of course much smaller and didn't have anything like the cachet or scale that the U.S. Embassy in Paris had. Mr. Irwin was a forgiving man, and in my case he had to be because I was learning as I went along and very much an introvert. He was a quiet, thoughtful person who never, never raised his voice. But he was always on the issue, and he was always asking probing questions. Scott Custer was in many ways what Mr. Irwin was not. He was sharp-tongued, outgoing and aggressive. While working for Mr. Irwin in Washington, Scott commuted to work on a Harley-Davidson. I can't imagine Jack Irwin on a Harley-Davidson. I can imagine him on a horse, though, because he was a superb rider. Working for him was a pleasure. What was interesting though was that this was at the very beginning of the Watergate affair, and here was a man who had been very close to and supportive of Richard Nixon. He was mortified.

Q: Did he get involved, I issued a subpoena to one of the _____ treasurer, Tom Pappas in Athens and I was consul general there. Did Irwin get caught up in this at all?

BEECROFT: Only later and indirectly, but I can share two anecdotes with you. He got a letter one day from Julie Nixon. Mr. Irwin had brought with him a woman with him as his personal assistant. She had worked for him in the Deputy Secretary's office, and you never, ever wanted to cross her. No one trifled with Velma. She had an unsettling way of smiling with everything but her eyes. Nothing got past her. We got along very well, and we relied on each other a lot. That day, I heard her saying, oh my goodness, oh my goodness. The letter from Julie Nixon to Ambassador Irwin said, "I hope you have read the article that I just published in the Reader's Digest, supporting and defending my father the president. I know that as a loyal supporter of the president you will want to support him at this difficult time." I can still see Mr. Irwin shaking his head as he read the letter.

The other one I remember was a letter he got signed, by Walter Annenberg, who at that time was the Ambassador to London. This letter was addressed to Mr. Irwin on Embassy London stationery, and it began with "Dear John." This raised eyebrows, because Annenberg knew very well that he Mr. Irwin always went by Jack. The gist was similar: Now is the time to stand up for the president. I know that you will join me, etc. - the same kind of message. So Mr. Irwin got in touch with Annenberg and said, "I got your letter." Annenberg replied, "What letter?" It turned out the letter was on bogus Embassy London stationery and had been drafted by Charles Colson. You can imagine how well that went down. Now, here are two very heavyweight political loyalist ambassadors who are basically being used by the White House. So they kept their distance. That was the spring of '74, when Georges Pompidou died.

Q: He was the president of France.

BEECROFT: President of France. The heir apparent to de Gaulle. President Richard Nixon came to the funeral. I do not know whether there was ever a discussion between them, between Nixon and Irwin even had a private discussion on that trip. I do know that I was the control officer to the Chief of Protocol, Ambassador Henry Catto. We were together at the Cathedral of Notre Dame for the funeral, in morning coats. Catto was still is - a big, tall Texan, a really delightful, politically astute man. So we're in Notre Dame and there's Nixon sitting next to Pierre Eliot Trudeau, and Nixon looked awful - heavily made up. This was a clearly a man under enormous strain. The contrast with Trudeau made it that much more striking. What was really funny about that event was that after the mass, Catto and I went out of Notre Dame at high speed, only to see Nixon's motorcade already pulling out. Here I am, with the State Department Chief of Protocol, in tails on the porch of Notre Dame, and no motorcade. So he looked at me and I looked at him and he said, "Well, what shall we do?" And I said, "Well, let's take the Metro." So we did. We had a great time. We rode the Metro dressed in tails, and both loved it. We got back to the Embassy just as the motorcade did. It was one of those things you never forget. Ambassador Catto is Chairman of the Atlantic Council now, and we still laugh about that adventure.

Q: Let's talk about Embassy Paris.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: Here '73 to '75.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: What was the embassy like?

BEECROFT: The Embassy was a very heady place to be. It had real clout in Paris. France was as always a difficult partner - some would say partner - but it was seen as essential.

Q: You're putting a question mark after partner?

BEECROFT: Yes. Remember 1973 was the "Year of Europe."

Q: This was Kissinger's idea.

BEECROFT: Yes. Henry Kissinger had decided that the beginning of the second Nixon term, which at that time no one thought would be abbreviated, would provide an opportunity to rein the Europeans in and get them back in line. Kissinger started out with the intention of building a strong and effective relationship with Michel Jobert, who was the French Foreign Minister. Of course, at that time there were no e-mails. Cables were the medium of choice for diplomatic communications, and it was still rather unusual for a secretary of state to phone a foreign minister directly. We even still had things called the despatches.

Q: Oh, yes.

BEECROFT: Remember the old forms? Anyway, it was the Year of Europe and the Embassy was the message-bearer and in many ways the interlocutor. Mr. Irwin would go see Jobert, and he would bring messages from Kissinger and convey the responses back to Kissinger. I well remember the curve of the relationship between Kissinger and Jobert, because it was so remarkable. The message salutations started out as Dear Mr. Minister, Dear Mr. Secretary. Then, as the ice began to thaw a little bit - because Jobert was a very prickly guy - it became Dear Dr. Kissinger, Dear Mr. Jobert. Then by midyear, it had advanced to Dear Henry, Dear Michel. By the end of the year, it was back to Dear Mr. Secretary, Dear Mr. Minister - full circle. Jobert was a complex man. He was brilliant, cynical, suspicious of U.S. intentions, and had a withered arm. He had grown up next to the ruins of a Roman city in Morocco. There were a lot of chips on this man's shoulder. He was also a superb novelist. His books are beautifully written in classic French. He was very confident of his own intellectual acumen and he wasn't about to be abashed or awed by Henry Kissinger.

Q: Was this a time I mean I guess there was always a time, but was there a particular thing about in various efforts of the United States to do this or to do that where the French were weighing in on the other side and screwing things up?

BEECROFT: The Year of Europe raised a lot of questions and a lot of eyebrows. For the French, every year is the Year of Europe and they couldn't understand what we had in mind. So I guess the answer is yes, our declaration of the Year of Europe raised their suspicions.

Pompidou may have been mortally ill, which virtually no one knew, but he was no fool. He and Jobert were very much on the same wavelength when it came to the U.S. Mr. Irwin spent his time trying to reassure two very suspicious people, Pompidou and Jobert, about what the motives were. Where security and defense issues are concerned, the French saw the Year of Europe as an attempt to either isolate them or get them back in the barn. They weren't about to be isolated, because they were leading the charge on the formation of a stronger European Union, and they weren't about to go back into the NATO integrated military structure either. They would always point out, as they still do today, that they are faithful and loyal members of NATO and that they're one of the largest bill payers in the alliance, which is true. What rankled Washington was that they chose to opt out of the integrated military structure. If you raise this, the French will ask you a very simple question: find me one reference to the integrated military structure in the North Atlantic Treaty. There is none. It's a political agreement. The French were not about to be trapped on that. That's what it was like to be at Embassy Paris in 1973-74. The atmosphere was prickly and was suspicious, but Mr. Irwin was a charming man and that made a huge difference. He had brought with him to Paris several hundred of his own paintings, a world-class art collection, Manet, Monet, Pissarro, you name them, all the impressionists, plus a fabulous collection of art from the American West. Mr. Irwin favored an artist named called John Chumley, who painted many rural American vistas. He also had several Remington sculptures. The French appreciated his exquisite taste and his love of the arts. Such things will open doors in France. He gave the most wonderful dinners and receptions. The Ambassador's residence in Paris is an old Rothschild mansion on the rue du Faubourg St.-Honoré 1/2. It's a glorious building with French doorwhat else? that open onto a beautiful lawn and garden in the back, so when the weather's good you can have receptions outside. He used the Residence to the hilt.

Q: You mentioned the foreign minister, I want to use the "intellectuals". Were they a group that were considered important at the time and did Irwin make overtures to them?

BEECROFT: Oh, he did more than make overtures. I mean, he would make it a point to include intellectuals and artists at his various events. He knew what the pressure points were and where the real levers of influence are in France. I remember a reception he gave once in honor of the Alvin Ailey Dance Troupe, which had been performing in Paris. Alvin Ailey himself was there. Literally hundreds of the great lights of Paris were there. You could see people walking around the Residence, looking at the paintings, looking at the sculptures and they would come forth with that cliché 1/2 you always hear from Europeans when you don't fit their stereotype: "But he is not a typical American." My response would always be, "What is a typical American?" .

Q: How did you find operating there because sometimes an ambassador's aide is a pain in the ass to most of the other people. You're running around and sort of a low ranking low squirt demanding papers and doing this sort of thing. How did you find this worked?

BEECROFT: I think it was Debussy who once said of the music of Wagner that it had its good moments and its bad half hours. The good part was that you were operating in that quite heady environment. I can remember once getting the Admin Counselor so mad at me that he wouldn't talk to me for a few days. But I was carrying out Mr. Irwin's guidance on a point that clearly mattered to him, or I wouldn't have done it. You had to be persistent. You had to ask uncomfortable questions. You had to do what the Ambassador could not personally do.

By the way, those were the days when the front gate of the Embassy was wide open. I used to drive into the front courtyard every morning, swing around to one side and park my car in the Embassy basement. You didn't have to show any ID; you just drove in and parked. Try that now.

I found that as time went on and I learned the trade, it was important to have one or two allies in each section, whether it was the Political Section or the Economic Section or the Admin Section or Consular or USIA or the Defense Attaché's office, someone you could pick up the phone and call discreetly. That way, you could often avoid raising eyebrows. People tended to what the Ambassador's aide was poking around about this time. Mr. Irwin was a man of many parts. Having worked at a high level in Washington, he knew his way around. He was always asking questions. He wanted people to come in and talk. Allen Holmes was one. Allen was the Political Counselor when I arrived, and we are still friends. Hank Cohen succeeded him. They are both consummate professionals, and Mr. Irwin was asking them questions all the time.

Q: How well, how important was it with the sort of the political world of France, you know, I mean the communists were always hovering. At this time Eurocommunism was considered to be a threat.

BEECROFT: Oh, yes. The one French political party that Mr. Irwin didn't have much to do with was the French communist party. I don't think George Marchais ever came to the Residence, but the Political Section talked with people all over the political spectrum. After a year in the ambassador's office, I joined the Political Section. That was the usual progression for the Ambassador's Staff Assistant: after a year you would go into a line office. At that point, I had never served in a line office in an embassy. I'd been deputy POLAD at SHAPE and Staff Aide in Paris. I wanted to get to do some substance. As Staff Assistant, I felt I was losing the ability to read for content you skim everything. Because I spoke good French, I went to work in the Internal Political Unit, which consisted of three or four people. Each one took part of the French political spectrum. I did the Right and the Center. At that time, the Far Right was a joke. It isn't anymore.

Q: What about Jean-Marie Le Pen?

BEECROFT: Oh, he was around, but he just wasn't taken seriously. His daughter, who is his de facto successors, was at that time a teenager. We had one officer who did only the left, a colorful guy named John Dobrin, you may remember him. Joe Preselater Ambassador to Uzbekistan - and I worked together on the right and center. And there was a fellow named Mike Davis, a wonderful person who not long after, while still a young man, had a stroke that effectively ended his active career. Joe had a crush from afar on Princess Caroline of Monaco and had several photos of her on his office wall.

Yes, internal political affairs in France were seen by Washington as important, which is why we had four people covering them. We were expected to be out and about. I spent that year regularly visiting various party headquarters and attending political conventions. In addition, the French have a tradition of political clubs. These are like less tightly knit political organizations that lean in the direction of one party or another, but are normally independent. Michel Jobert founded one while he was Foreign Minister. I also developed contacts in the various ministries who watched or were affiliated with the parties. I went to the political conventions of the Gaullists and the Liberal Giscard's party. It was a really fun job. Oh, and I also got to know some good restaurants, because you taking a contact to lunch was a regular part of the job. The Internal Unit made book on all the good restaurants.

Q: What was the attitude, it wasn't your particular sphere, but what was the attitude toward the socialists? I assume Mitterrand was there. How did we feel about the socialists?

BEECROFT: Yes. There was a lot of concern, because at that point the Constitution of the Fifth Republic was still new and still largely untested. There had never been such a thing as cohabitation. There was a lot of uncertainty about whether cohabitation could work.

Q: You better explain what cohabitation means.

BEECROFT: Okay. The French Fifth Republic constitution, as promulgated in 1958 by de Gaulle, allows for the possibility of a president from one side of the political spectrum and a prime minister from the other side. When this happens, it's called cohabitation. At that point, it had never happened. Now, the first sign of change came when I was there, when Giscard, who was not a Gaullist, became president. So Giscard, being a centrist and not a Gaullist, had to cohabit or cohabitate, I don't know what the English is, with a Gaullist prime minister Jacques Chirac, no less.

Q: Well, I mean was there that much difference between the Gaullists and the centrists?

BEECROFT: A centrist like Giscard didn't necessarily consider being president of France as being the keeper of the flame of French nationalism. He tended to be more in the Jimmy Carter mode. By contrast, the Gaullists, de Gaulle considered it almost unpatriotic to be not a Gaullist. As for the socialists, there was a sense in France, shared to some extent in Washington that if they ever gained power, France would be on the slippery slope to communism. But people didn't reckon with the cleverness of Mitterrand, and his determination to neutralize the Communists. Mitterrand, in fact, was not really a known quantity. In 1978, three years after I left, the Socialists came very close to taking power, but failed. This produced a lot of unease in Washington. When the Socialists actually did take power four years later, no one was sure what to expect.

Q: What about when you were there covering the right.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: Were you looking at sort of the scandals that have come out. I mean there was an awful lot of money sloshing around in this political system unlike except that the American system doesn't have.

BEECROFT: Perish the thought.

Q: I mean Chirac has got real problems about when he was mayor of Paris.

BEECROFT: But nothing really happened.

Q: You know there was money coming out of the former colonies and all that. Was this something that you were looking at?

BEECROFT: Not really. I think at that point, even more than now, the French establishment has a way of locking these things down tight. There is the inside and there's the rest, and once you are on the inside you're exempt. Chirac, even then, was very much on the inside. He had been Pompidou's executive assistant - chef de cabinet. Pompidou called him "mon bulldozer." Chirac was the go-to guy. You needed something done, Jacques would get it done. After he fell out with Chirac and left the Prime Ministry, he become mayor of Paris. By the way, being mayor of Paris is the second most powerful job in France after the president. The mayor of Paris is more powerful than the prime minister.

Q: Did you get a look at the French system and the high schools? I always avoid using French pronunciations because I never used it, although I studied it. In a way it's an establishment when you were there, there was an establishment and it was very pronounced.

BEECROFT: Still is. It's a little bit more tolerant and open now. You're referring to what are called the "grandes écoles" a half-dozen state-run university-level schools which are separate from the regular university system. That's where the intellectual elite are formed. They are considered (and consider themselves) for the rest of their lives to be something quite special. You have the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, or Sciences Po. You have the Ecole des Mines, literally the school of mines, which is actually the MIT of France. There are a half dozen others, including the Ecole Polytechnique, the Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, or ENA. If you don't go to ENA, you won't get to reach the top of the French bureaucracy; it's that simple. And those are prestige jobs in a bureaucratic state like France.

Now, obviously most French students are not accepted by those schools, so there is a set of inbred expectations, which are there from the outset go. We at the Embassy were dealing regularly with products of the grandes écoles, because these people often go into politics, all across the spectrum, from far left to far right. They also enter the world of finance, banking and economics. This is the club.

Q: Did you find when you were there the French were trying to figure out, you know the Americans for the British and the French are hard to figure out because with the British you've got this class system, things are changing, but with the French the school system and all. Did you know who's who and who is coming up and somebody can come up from university and really be very capable and move well up in the system.

BEECROFT: That's right.

Q: This must confuse the hell out of them.

BEECROFT: I think it confuses them a lot more than it confuses us. It's easy to understand a system that is more structured, like the French, but the kind of social mobility that we take for granted, they don't take for granted. Even now, for example, ENA, or least part of it, has been moved to Strasbourg. You can't imagine the protests when that decision was taken. There's still a feeling that if you're in Strasbourg you're somehow not as relevant as if you're in Paris. Everything in France is centered on Paris. As a student, when I went to Paris from Strasbourg for weekends occasionally, I would be sort of snickered at because I had acquired a marked Alsatian accent. That was when I realized that the French reputation of being hostile to foreigners is oversimplified. First of all it's not the French, it's the Parisians. Second of all, they're not hostile to foreigners, they're hostile to anybody who isn't a Parisian. If you come from Strasbourg, Bordeaux or Marseilles and speak your brand of French in Paris, you're just as likely to be laughed at as if you come from New York or London.

Q: As you're looking at the rightist parties, was there an anti-immigrant or was there even an immigration problem? I mean today this is probably the major one coming from North Africa and farther south in Africa from particularly Muslim countries. Was this a concern at the time you were there?

BEECROFT: Not to the degree you see today. First of all there were fewer Muslims in France than there are now. Second of all, there was a very strong and vivid memory in France of the Algerian war and the wave of pieds noirs - refugees from Algeria who had left for France. The pieds noirs were generally angry and resentful at the Algerians who had overcome them. But the immigrants, Muslim or not, hadn't yet shown up in such numbers in France itself.

Q: You were there at a time when we essentially pulled out not rather ignominiously from Vietnam. How did that play? Was it sort of rejoicing, schadenfreude or the equivalent?

BEECROFT: There was less of that than I would have anticipated, because the United States was in crisis in several different ways, not just Vietnam. The French always assume that it's easy to kick Uncle Sam because he's so big that he won't feel it. Watergate. The oil crisis of 1973. The defeat in Vietnam. These all came at about the same time. The staying power and the future role of the United States were very much in question, so there was less Schadenfreude than I would have expected. I think it's because when all is said and done, the French know they need us more than we need them, and that won't change. The oil crisis never hit Europe as badly as it hit us. Watergate, well, everybody knows how traumatic that was. When Nixon resigned in August of '74, the Parisian elite got busy trying to divine the "real reason" he left office. The French always look for plots. I remember one acquaintance - highly placed politically, should have known better - coming up to me and declaring, "You know, we understand the real reason. We know what happened. It was because Nixon was too friendly to the Arabs because of the oil crisis and so the Jewish interests on Wall Street forced him out." This is the kind of cockamamie theory that was going around. The French love this stuff and some always take it very seriously. But overall, there was relatively little Schadenfreude. In the media, there was some crowing that Uncle Sam was getting his comeuppance and looking more like the rest of us, but that's to be expected.

Q: You might explain what Schadenfreude is.

BEECROFT: Schadenfreude is one of these wonderful German words that is almost impossible to translate. It means "joy in the pain of others."

Q: Anyway, so you, how did your wife find Paris?

BEECROFT: Well, with a Ph.D. in French, she loved being in Paris, but with a young child, that meant she had her hands full. She was not working at the time. We lived in the embassy apartments in Neuilly, a Paris suburb, because as a junior officer I couldn't afford a Paris rental. Then, to complicate things further, our second child came along.

We did some wonderful things. In the summer of '74 we drove south through Burgundy, where good friends from Strasbourg lived - she was Welsh and had married a French fellow student. We visited them at their farm, then we drove down to Orange, the Pont du Gard, Marseille and Carcassonne, and across the Pyrenees to Catalonia and Mallorca. We had a wonderful trip. That September we also spent a week at Ste. Maxime, near St. Tropez. That was all very nice, but as the Ambassador's aide you were on call 24/7. When I went into the Political Section I got to travel, but on business as I mentioned, going to political conventions and things like that. Then in the fall of '74 Mette became pregnant with our second child. Pamela was born in Paris in April of '75, and we returned to the U.S. that summer.

Q: Where did you go then, this was in?

BEECROFT: '75.

Q: '75. Oh, I want to ask another question. What was your impression, you say you went to these party conventions. As an American looking at them, how did they work?

BEECROFT: They're not the same kind of showbiz set-pieces that we've gotten used to here. They usually were quite lively in terms of debate, in terms of distributing all kinds of theses and documents and proposals. Then the delegates would vote on various policy questions, political or economic or social or defense. This is, by the way, even more the case in Germany. There would not be just a sort of apotheosis of the candidate, although the candidate at the end would have his crowning moment; there actually was some substance to it. We did some serious reporting via cable to Washington.

Q: All right, then '75 whither?

BEECROFT: Well, I just couldn't get out of the staffing rut. At this point my wife Mette and I, with a brand new baby daughter, a six-year-old son, and my father not in the best of health back home, were feeling that it was time to get back to Washington. I could have stayed on another year in Paris, but it was time to go home. Then, in the late spring, I got a phone call from Washington asking if I would like to become a staff assistant to the Deputy Secretary of State. This came out of the blue, because I didn't know the Deputy Secretary and had never worked at the State Department.. Needless to say, I didn't say no to that. In the summer of 1975, I found myself in D - the Deputy Secretary's office.

Q: Who was the Deputy Secretary?

BEECROFT: Robert S. Ingersoll, a Nixon political appointee who had moved up to become Deputy Secretary after serving as Ambassador to Japan and assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. He had had a highly successful career with Borg-Warner, and went to the Deputy Secretary's office - with expectations of working closely on substance with Henry Kissinger. Well, that never happened, and Ingersoll left government in late 1975. When I was cleaning out his desk, I came upon an early memo from him to HAKissinger - proposing weekly private coordination breakfasts between the two of them. I learned that there had been a couple of breakfasts early on, but that was all. Dr. Kissinger was not a corporate-style team player. Ingersoll was, however, knowledgeable on economic affairs, something Kissinger had little interest in. So Mr. Ingersoll did his best to create a niche for himself in that area.

Q: This is the Ford administration?

BEECROFT: That's right. Ford became president in August of '74, and this was a year later.

Q: You were doing that staff job from when to when?

BEECROFT: Summer of '75 to summer of '76.

Q: Yes. How were you used?

BEECROFT: It was sort of a magnified version of what I'd been doing as ambassador's assistant in Paris. I attended all of the Deputy Secretary's staff meetings, and took notes on actions and follow-up requirements. Sometimes I would fill in for Secretary Kissinger's staffers. the Secretary's office - which is right down the inner corridor on the 7th Floor. I would pester people for memos the Deputy Secretary was waiting for from one or another bureau, and basically act as his eyes and ears at the bureau level. You had to work closely with S to make sure we stayed in sync with the Secretary. The executive secretary at that time was a crusty old bird named George Springsteen. I think he ate nails for breakfast; he had all the subtlety of a drill sergeant. To establish a working relationship with George was something of a struggle, but that's the kind of thing you would strive for.

Q: Well, did you find yourself I mean Henry Kissinger was certainly unique. He played everything and an awful lot of things nobody else knew. Did you find that you were at least attempting to be a spy on trying to figure out what the Secretary was up to so you could inform Ingersoll?

BEECROFT: Not often, no. It was a one-way relationship, from HAK downward. S was not a transparent place. As I said, on occasion, if his staff was flapping on something else, I would go down to S and take notes for his office calls. He insisted on verbatim notes of all his meetings, even with other Administration officials. Kissinger had a wonderful way of depersonalizing you. If he didn't know you, he wouldn't look up and say "Who are you?" He would look up and ask "What is that?" The best thing to do, if you were taking notes for Kissinger, was stay out of the way - be a fly on the wall. The S staffers and D staffer Kim Pendleton and Steve Worrell were also staffers in D at the time - kept a good relationship among ourselves. Jerry Bremer, David Passage and Jock Covey were three of HAK's staffers. It was an interesting group.

Q: Did you get involved in any issues or highlighting issues?

BEECROFT: On the economic side, we got involved in issues related to the aftermath of the petroleum crisis, the foreign policy aspects of that. I'm not an economist, but I supported him on building contacts in the Treasury Department, in OMB, in STthe Special Trade Representative. We did a lot of work with STR. That continued and even accelerated when Mr. Ingersoll was replaced by Chuck RobinsoCharles W. Robinson. We all went together to Nairobi for UNCTAD IV in the spring of '76. It was my first time in Africa. Like Ingersoll, Robinson was a thoroughly decent person. I had just lost my father, and the Africa trip really helped me snap back. At the end of the conference, Robinson said to me, "You've never been here, right?" I said, "No." He said, "Why don't you stay a week and take some vacation?" So I took a safari trip to the Amboseli Game Preserve, at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro. There are not that many people at Robinson's level who would do that.

Chuck Robinson was Under Secretary for Economic Affairs until Ingersoll left government, then he moved up to D. He was very much a Westerner, something of a chance-taker, who always wore a bow tie. He was an entrepreneur and engineer who struck it rich as founder of Marcona Mining, which did a lot of work in Latin America. He invented and patented the slurry process - mixing minerals with water for transport on conveyor belts. He was also active in shipping. Like Ingersoll, he focused mainly on economic issues. But his relationship with HAK was different. Chuck was quite easy-going and personable, and didn't feel the need to force a personal relationship with the Secretary. He just did his job, and that suited Dr. Kissinger fine. I think he gained some respect around the building for that.

Q: How about the bureaus? How did you find relations with them for either of your two?

BEECROFT: Frustrating. There was so much focus on Kissinger that there wasn't a lot left over for D. You might think, I'm representing the office of the person who is, theoretically, the second most powerful man in the building. But it didn't often play out that way, particularly since the Undersecretary for Political Affairs was Larry Eagleburger, who enjoyed a close personal friendship with HAK. And Larry was a hell of a scrapper.

Q: Did you feel that, I mean was there sort of a sense that okay, we'll do our thing over here and we're not going to interfere with you. We won't compete, we won't bother you, but we'll just do our thing?

BEECROFT: Yes. I would say that the Deputy Secretary kept a watching brief on pretty much every issue, because he was the Acting Secretary when Kissinger was on the road, and Kissinger loved being on the road. The problem with that was that the real power was often elsewhere again, think Larry Eagleburger. At that time, before the advent of e-mails, Kissinger kept up a very active stream of cables from his plane - the SECTO and TOSEC series, Secretary To and To the Secretary. We in D didn't automatically get to see all those cables! We had to fight to see the SECTOs and TOSECs, and I know we didn't see them all. Then there was the NODIS CHEROKEE series, which was even more restricted. CHEROKEE, by the way, because Kissinger lived at some point on Cherokee Street. Larry, on the other hand, saw them all.

Q: What would you do, go down and say, please sir, may I have some cables?

BEECROFT: No point. It required dueling with George Springsteen, and the only person in D who could do that was Bob Duemling, the Executive Assistant in D, who was considerably more senior than Kim Pendleton, Steve Worrell or me. And Bob had to pick his battles carefully. All this was above my pay grade.

Q: Well, how about with Ingersoll and Robinson. Did they learn to live with this and not let this get under their skin?

BEECROFT: They had no choice.

Q: Well, but I mean you can have a situation and you have no choice but it can rankle and you can say okay, that's the way it is and move ahead.

BEECROFT: Well, when I got to Ingersoll's office he had already been in the job for a year. By mid-'75, he had grown sadder but wiser. This memo I mentioned, proposing regular breakfasts, was already over a year old at that point. I think a major reason Mr. Ingersoll left was because he saw what the limits were and he figured - you know. When Robinson came in, he barely got the seat warm. Then came the election in '76 and he was gone.

Q: So, what happened on January 20th, 1977?

BEECROFT: Actually I was gone from D by then, because in the summer of '76 I got a very appealing job offer and took it. One of the advantages of being in a Seventh-floor staff job like is that you get to know a lot of people around the Department and they get to know you, for better or worse. You know what it's like; people are always making book on each other. Anyway, it was known that I had a political-military background. That has come in handy more than once over my career, including my sitting in this office at the National War College. One of the people I had gotten to know in the Bureau of Political- Military affairs, PM - Dr. Edward Ifft, a scientist - asked if I would like to join the staff that handled the strategic nuclear arms limitations talks with the Soviet Union, SALT TWO. This would also provide the opportunity periodically to travel to Geneva and negotiate nuclear arms control directly with the Soviet Union. We weren't talking reductions at that point, just control. This sounded very appealing, because it combined several elements of my background - NATO, the army, and the strategic relationship between us and the Russians. So I accepted, and in the summer of '76, with Deputy Secretary Robinson's blessing, I left D for PM.

Q: You did that from when to when?

BEECROFT: I stayed there until '79, three years, of which I spent a total of a year in Geneva in two- or three-months increments, negotiating nuclear arms control with the Russians.

Q: When you arrived there working on the SALT TWO?

BEECROFT: SALT TWO.

Q: When you arrived there what was the feeling that you were getting as the new boy on the block from the delegation, the people who work on this both in Washington and Geneva about, is this a viable thing or is this sort of eternal set of negotiations?

BEECROFT: Actually, I think there was a real determination to reach agreement, based on the assessment that it was doable because it was in both sides' interests. This was a very cold part of the Cold War. Ditch 1/2tente had been more or less a failure. We were now entering the Brezhnev era of real suspicion of American motives and certainly there was a real suspicion of Soviet motives on our side, but SALT ONE had been enough of a success so that both sides agreed that it was worth seeing if we could go further in controlling strategic nuclear arms.

Now, I did something that was a bit unusual at the outset. I tend to be a hands-on person. So I requested permission to familiarize myself personally with our weapons systems. It turned out that very few of the civilians doing SALT had ever seen a Minuteman Missile, for example. PM supported me. So off I went to Omaha for a full briefing from the Strategic Air Command on our missile capabilities, and what we estimated the Soviet capabilities were. Then I went to Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota, B-52 base, and flew out on a helicopter to a Minuteman III launch site, 50 miles from nowhere out on the great plains. The silo was deep in the ground underneath in a disguised farmhouse. Following that, I went to Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, which is collocated with an Energy Department nuclear weapons lab, and took a two-week "instant expert" course in nuclear weapons theory and construction. I went up to Los Alamos too, and met with one of our nuclear physicist consultants on the delegation. Some months later, I also visited a Minuteman II silo in Arkansas. With all that under my belt, I felt that I had at least some feel for the weapons and the people who are responsible for them. You know, when you talk to an Air Force lieutenant colonel who spends a month at a time sitting in a control room in a silo under the North Dakota plain, you get a sense of the reality of the nuclear stalemate at the individual level. A second officer sits on the other side of the control room, and they each have a control panel with a lock. It's a dual key system. Each officer has a key, and both of them have to turn their keys at the same time to arm and launch the missile. But the panels are too far apart for one officer to turn both keys. Also, each one is authorized, if the other guy goes bonkers, to shoot him. And they sit down there and watch Days of Our Lives, because there's nothing much else to do except for periodic simulated launch exercises.

Q: Days of Our Lives - That's a soap opera.

BEECROFT: That's right. And you're down there taking pictures. They allow you to take pictures. I still have the photos.

Q: Did you get involved with the navy side of things?

BEECROFT: As usual, the Navy is a different culture. I got to ride a nuclear submarine only much later, in the late '80s. But that was an attack sub. I never did get to see a boomer which is what they call the ballistic-missile-launching submarines, SLBMs. But all three services represented on both delegations. The navy guys were quite colorful.

Q: Ever since the failure of the United States to ratify the League of Nations it's been sort of a mantra that you've got to have somebody from congress, from the senate along. Were they part of the delegation, did you have anybody there?

BEECROFT: Not on a regular basis, but Congress did play an advisory role, and the key players would come out to Geneva periodically. Teddy Kennedy used to come out. Scoop Jackson was interested. I had great admiration for him. Others were Joe Biden and Richard Lugar. Their number one concern was verification how do you know what the Soviets, with their secretive society and concealment measures, really have, in terms of both numbers and capabilities? In fact, SALT TWO was never ratified because of an ultimate lack of confidence in the Congress about our ability to verify adequately. You may remember that when Reagan came into office, his motto for arms control was "trust but verify." That was a response to the failure, at the 11th hour, to ratify SALT TWO. Although the agreement was scrupulously respected by both sides, it was never ratified by Congress.

Q: What were you doing? I mean during this period, what was happening and what were you doing?

BEECROFT: In Washington, I was on the interagency working group that hammered out the U.S. proposals on various weapons systems, ours and theirs. Both sides had what we called a triad of weapons submarine-launched ballistic missiles, or SLBMs; ground-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs; and heavy bombers. This was the triad. The heavy bomber B-52s on our side, Bears and Bisons on theirs - were known as the "air-breathing leg of the triad." We used to joke about what an air-breathing leg would look like.

Q: Oh my God.

BEECROFT: It could get very theological. The players included State, ACDA (the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, which doesn't exist anymore), and the Defense Department, with lots of intelligence support. Our working group would meet at the Pentagon, or State, or ACDA, and later on at the OEO the Old Executive Office Building and debate how to deal with very complex issues of nuclear balance and capabilities. One of the strangest aspects of SALT II, which was carried over from SALT ONE, was that we didn't actually count the missiles. There was no way to do so, since silos have lids and the contents can't be photographed from satellites. Instead, SALT ONE and SALT TWO counting rules were based on the numbers of launchers or silos, which can be seen from space or from a U-2. Put another way, we didn't count the bullets, we counted the guns. From a satellite, you can see how many silos there are in a missile launch field in the Ukraine. You can tell how many launch tubes there are on a Soviet nuclear submarine, when it's in dry dock. Both sides knew how many B-52s the U.S. had. We knew more or less many Bears and Bisons the Soviets had, although there's a wrinkle there. I won't bore you with it, but that got to be a serious negotiating issue.

Q: This is the Backfire problem?

BEECROFT: No, that was a late-breaking issue having to do with the Backfire's range, which I believe was a political obstacle trumped up by opponents in Washington. What I was referring to was the fact that our B-52s don't look anything like the tankers that refuel them. We used KC-135s, which are converted DC-10s. But the Soviets built their bombers, their tankers and their reconnaissance aircraft on the same two airframes. So you had a Bison bomber and a Bison tanker. You had a Bear bomber and a Bear reconnaissance aircraft. Since you're not counting tankers and reconnaissance aircraft, how can you tell one from the other? It isn't good enough just to say "Trust the Bison with tail number 68 is not a bomber because it's a tanker and the bomb bay doors are welded shut." We wanted to fly close enough so we could match tail number to a plane whose bomb bay doors were visibly welded shut, and the Soviets would have none of that. This became an important issue later on.

Anyway, that was the sort of thing we would debate at this end - come up with negotiating positions which would then table in Geneva. Periodically, I would go out to Geneva, at the other end of the food chain, and help negotiate the positions. This was fascinating. You could follow it from the genesis to the execution.

Q: Let's talk about the negotiations when you were doing this. How did you read the Soviets? Were these genuine negotiations at the time you were doing this?

BEECROFT: I think for the most part they were genuine. I say for the most part because the Soviets always had hang-ups. They had an inferiority complex that never quit, and they were always comparing themselves to us while never admitting it. And this was at a time when, you'll recall, Jimmy Carter, declared that the U.S. was suffering from "malaise." That funk only got worse after the hostage crisis began, but the Soviets never felt that; they always saw themselves as playing catch-up to us. There's a well known anecdote that goes back to the first SALT ONE meetings in Helsinki in the early '70's. The Soviets led off with a typically vague, stock "statement of principles." In response, our chief negotiator at the time, Gerard Smith, got right down to brass tacks: "Well, you know, we're concerned about your missile fields at Derazhnya, where you have 28 silos for SS-11s," and went on at length in some detail. It quickly became clear that some of the Soviet delegation were very uneasy about this. No sooner had he finished than their chief military representative, a general, came over to Smith and said, "Did you have to tell our civilians all those details?" A short time later, one of their Foreign Ministry people came over and said, "Very interesting presentation. Thank you very much." It turned out that we were telling the civilians on the Soviet delegation things that they had never heard before. Even in SALT TWO, five years later, they always paid attention to our statements. We knew that at the Soviet Mission office in Geneva, there was one photocopy machine and it was behind locked doors.

Q: Yes. You were doing this from when to when?

BEECROFT: '76 to '79.

Q: What happened?

BEECROFT: Well, as we got closer to a real agreement, we began running into increasing resistance from our own military, especially the Air Force. I don't know if the name General Edward Rowny means anything to you.

Q: Yes, as a matter of fact I had a short interview with him.

BEECROFT: Okay. Well, Ed Rowny was never convinced that SALT TWO was a good thing. He stayed in close touch with key contacts in the Hill, including a young staffer in Senator Scoop Jackson's office named Richard Pearle.

Q: The prince of darkness.

BEECROFT: Yes. At the very last minute, as the negotiations were coming to an end and there was talk of a Carter-Brezhnev summit in Vienna, Rowny quit the delegation in protest because he said the SALT TWO treaty was unverifiable. This led an intense debate on Capitol Hill about whether it ought to be ratified. It coincided with the discovery of a Soviet brigade in Cuba, and of course the two became linked. Part of the problem had to do with our ability to inform our own Congress about how effective our verification methods were, because, as always, our intelligence people were so concerned about sources and methods. At one point, I suggested semi-seriously that we should use one of our old satellites to photograph the cars in the Pentagon parking lot, so the Senators could read the license plate numbers. We couldn't get our people to agree, even using an obsolete satellite, because the argument went the Soviets could deduce from that how much more effective our newer satellites were.

In Geneva, there was a smaller group, just a couple of people on each side plus our best interpreters, called the Conforming Group. Our job was to compare the English and Russian versions of what was called the JDT - the Joint Draft Text of the SALT TWO Treaty and make sure they said the same thing. Shortly before the action was scheduled to move to Vienna, where Carter and Brezhnev met signed the Treaty in June '79, my counterpart on the Russian side of the Conforming Group, asked me an unusual question. He was a pleasant but intense little man, very thin and gaunt, named Victor Smolin. Sadly, he has since died. So Victor says, "Robert, how are you doing with the JDT?" I say, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well, my typists are about to go on strike. They just can't keep up. We're running out of carbon paper. How are your typists doing?" I said, "Would you like to see my typists?" He said, "Sure." Well, we didn't have typists. We had an early word processor called a Vydek, which was produced Standard Oil Company. We would type the JDT and make all the changes ourselves. It looked like a jukebox or a video game - keyboard here, screen here, printer here in a single cabinet, and it went purr, purr, purr as it printed, back and forth, back and forth. Remember those printers?

Q: Oh, yes.

BEECROFT: And a big flat floppy disc, about 14 inches.

Q: They really flopped.

BEECROFT: They really flopped. This was 1979 state of the art. So we bring Victor Smolin into this room, and he says, "Where are your typists?" Someone types "JDT," and bing, up it comes on the screen. You should have seen his face. "This is what we're sending to Vienna" - a floppy disc. He'd never seen a floppy disc; he'd never seen a computer. You could just see him thinking oh my God, how are we going to keep up with these people? They shipped 12 typists to Vienna and we shipped a floppy disc or two.

Q: Oh boy.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: When you left in '79 I assume this was before all hell broke loose both in Iran and in Afghanistan, what was the state of things at that point when you left?

BEECROFT: The Iran hostage crisis had begun, and the Soviet brigade in Cuba were front page news. Those were the death knells to our hopes for ratification of SALT TWO. The treaty was observed by both sides for years, even though it was never ratified. There was a lot of frustration on the delegation, because we knew it was a perfectly good treaty in that it capped further expansion. It didn't mandate reductions - it took START to do that and Reagan deserves credit for that - but at least it stopped the expansion of launcher numbers. And we really came out ahead on that score anyway, because right in the middle of the negotiations - it must have been 1978 - we announced that we were going to deploy cruise missiles. The Soviets said, Well, how are we supposed to count those? You see, an arms control treaty of that scope is mainly about counting rules. It's not just about capability; it's about counting rules. The fact is you can't count cruise missiles because unlike an ICBM, they're small. We could put 30 cruise missiles on a rotary launcher inside a B-52, but we said, oh no, it still counts as one. And the Soviets eventually bought it.

Q: Was somebody pointing out the fact that this is all very good, but we're talking about the destruction of the earth as we know it and if they let go. So, 1,000 2,000 really.

BEECROFT: Well, the question was occasionally asked in terms of what strategic nuclear sufficiency really meant - how many times you wanted to make the rubble bounce.

Q: So in a way the idea was to begin to get a handle on the whole problem?

BEECROFT: The idea was more than that. The idea was to establish a culture of confidence in which you could get to that point, and that I think we had achieved. That's no small achievement when you're dealing with people as paranoid as Russians can be.

Q: Oh, yes. Let's, in '79 you left and we'll stop at this point and we'll put at the end where we'll pick it up. Where do you go?

BEECROFT: I go to Bonn.

Q: All right. We're off to Deutschland.

BEECROFT: Jawohl.

Q: Today is the 13th of October, 2004. Bob, 1979, you're off to Bonn.

BEECROFT: Right.

Q: All right. What were you doing, how did it come about going to Bonn and what were you up to?

BEECROFT: The DCM, Bill Woessner, and the Political Counselor, Dick Smyser

Q: I've interviewed both of them.

BEECROFT: - knew that I spoke German and that I'd been doing arms control. They put two and two together and asked if I wanted to come to Germany. Of course I didn't have to think very hard about that. We left Washington '79 and were off to Bonn. Actually I went out in September with our 11-year-old son Chris, so he could start school at the beginning of the year. My wife Mette, with our 4-year-old daughter Pamela, followed after Christmas. She was helping to open the Family Liaison Office at the time. Chris and I lived in an apartment in the "Siedlung," a sort of American garden apartment complex on the Rhine, for the fall.

Q: You were in Bonn from when to when?

BEECROFT: '79 to '83, four years. I extended for a year, it was such fun. I was one of two internal political officers in the Political Section. Obviously, internal politics was something that mattered a whole lot in Germany. Todd Becker was my boss. Robert W. Becker - now the deputy head of the OSCE Mission in Zagreb. Todd and I became good friends and have remained so ever since. In fact, we were on a panel together at Chapel Hill just about six weeks ago. Todd was there for the first year and then he went off to Greece. Eventually he became our first Consul General in Leipzig after the wall came down. My second cohort in the political internal unit was Paul Molineaux. He and I worked together for three years. That was a very interesting time because, well, first of all, Ambassador Walter Stoessel left in the summer of '80, there was a gap, as there often is in such cases, until it was clear who was going to win the U.S. presidential election. Then when Reagan came in, Arthur Burns became the Ambassador. I worked quite closely with him for three years. It was a marvelous experience. For a man who was over 80, his mind, I mean he was 80 going on 40, and he really was very interested in the young generation of Germans. In a sense he came across as the Jewish grandfather they had never had. He truly cared about young people. He reached out, he established a dialogue. This was just at the point when the Greens were coming up. I got to know Petra Kelly. I introduced the Burns and Kelly and actually set up a series of lunches between them which were quite fascinating.

Q: You were there really at a critical time. '79 was really when a new generation was coming up that didn't have both the Nazi hang-up or the American occupation hang-up. This is a new group taking a different view than before, wasn't it?

BEECROFT: Very true. The chancellor at that point was Helmut Schmidt. I covered 15 party conventions in four years - from the Greens all the way to the CSU, from the far left to the far right. This was at a time when it looked as if the SPD, the Social Democrats, were going to be in power forever, with the FDP under Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher as their helpmate. That's the way it started out. Schmidt ran against Franz Josef Strauss in 1980, defeated him handily. It looked as if Schmidt was going to be in power for as long as he wanted to, but it was just at that point that this new generation, full of questions, full of doubts about the establishment, came along. It was similar to the protest wave that we had had in the U.S. in the late '60s, but a little bit later. I'll never forget the SPD convention of 1982 in Munich, because that was where Willy Brandt, who was pied piper for the young Social Democrats, took the party away from Schmidt. It was very dramatic. That fall, Schmidt lost the chancellorship and the CDU's Helmut Kohl became Chancellor.

That was the kind of event that I covered for four years. I went to party conventions, did a lot of reporting. After the 1980 SPD convention, Schmidt was riding high. He had had problems at that convention that were related to the German relationship to the United States. It was at the point when the first discussions were going on about the deployment of Soviet mid-range SS-20 missiles and the proposed U.S. response, the Pershing 2 intermediate-range missile. This became a huge issue and contributed to Schmidt's downfall. Well, we sent a cable back to Washington, its title was "Cracks in the Plaster," which got a lot of attention because it went against the prevailing view that Schmidt was politically invulnerable. It had two messages: a) don't rule out Helmut Kohl, he has a future; b) the SPD is not as united and monolithic as it looks. Two years later the SPD chickens came home to roost and Kohl became chancellor.

Q: I'd like to talk a bit about how you saw during this period - '79 to '83 the German party system, I mean it really is quite different than sort of the American system.

BEECROFT: Oh, yes.

Q: Where they have essentially if you don't belong to a party you're out and you get on a list and you don't essentially you don't owe allegiance to your constituency, you owe allegiance to your party. When you started looking at this, how did you see this, strengths and minuses in the party system and then how did it translate into the various parties?

BEECROFT: What struck me right off the bat was that the German political parties were much more oriented toward ideas than ours - if I could put it this way, theology, a belief systems compared to American parties, which tend to be more operational and less ideological. I mean, this was before the great polarization that we now see in the United States. When you went to a convention, whether it was the SPD or the FDP or the CDU or the CSU the Greens, whoever, you went in and they loaded you down with paper. All of these tracts and theses, not just the simple platforms that American parties produce, which tend to be least-common-denominator and very general. You would get tracts and counter-tracts, and all of these things would be very heavily debated. It struck me as very German - you've got to go through the whole intellectual exercise to come out at a place where the local party organizations would be willing to support the platform.

The German Greens are a good example of the impact of a belief system. In the '70's they were by and large a politically diffuse, agrarian organization. A Bavarian farmer was the head of the Greens at the time. But in the late '70's, the party basically reinvented itself. You can't imagine such a dramatic change in our system, really. The Greens at that point were on the verge of becoming meaningful. A good example was Joschka Fischer.

Q: Who is now the Foreign Minister.

BEECROFT: Yes. I remember Fischer when he still wore sandals and was violently anti-establishment. We sent Fischer on his first trip to the U.S. Remember the Leader Grant program?

Q: That must have caused a lot of heartburn and all that.

BEECROFT: Actually, at the State Department were fascinated by what we were doing. We also sent a young fellow who was the Chairman of the Young Socialists named Gerhard Schroeder. Schroeder had sworn that he would never go to the U.S. as long as we were in Vietnam. I went and talked to him and I said "Well, we're not there any more. Time to go?" And he did it. Whether you liked Schroeder's politics or not, or Fischer's, the fact is we picked the German leaders of the future. It's a wonderful program and it's a shame that we no longer put the resources into it that we used to.

Q: I don't know if you came over on it, but I remember hearing Petra Kelly talk at the State Department.

BEECROFT: Right. Petra didn't need our support. We never spent money on Petra, other than the lunches with Ambassador Burns. She had plenty of friends and contacts in the U.S. After all, Petra campaigned for Bobby Kennedy when she was a student at AU in '68. She was in many ways - at least to appearance half-American. She spoke American English without an accent. I also knew Gert Bastian, the retired German General who was her lover. He later killed her and then himself.

Q: Back to the parties.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: Did you find within the party structure, I mean you can have all your intellectual stuff, but were the guys in the back room controlling this?

BEECROFT: You know how the German system works. It's frightfully complicated. 50% of the candidates are popularly chosen. The other 50% are elected from party lists, and those lists are very much a product of backroom deals. This is down and dirty politics at its most German. They're selected at the Land level. The lists are made up of party favorite sons, very often people of influence who don't have the charisma, or who aren't good enough campaigners, to win a direct seat. So they instead get a high place on a party list and get into the Bundestag that way. Genscher, for example, was never directly elected, but it didn't matter. In fact, at that time, and I think it's probably still true, the Free Democrats had no directly elected deputies at all, but it didn't matter. As long as a party gets over 5% of the national vote, then it has a claim to representation.

Q: Yes. Well, how open were the parties to you?

BEECROFT: Wide open. This was at a time when there were still vestiges of the old protectorate relationship between the U.S. and Germany. If you went to a party meeting, it was just assumed that you had a right to be there. Not only did Todd Becker and Paul Molineaux and I go to party conventions, we also went to district organization meetings at the local level. I remember getting into a huge debate once at the SPD district organization outside of Heidelberg. The local Bundestag Deputy was Gert Weisskirchen, who is now one of the most senior SPD Deputies. There were lots of university professors there, and their students. This was at the point where the debate over the deployment of the SS-20s and the Pershing-2s were at its most heated, and man, that room, it was really ugly. They welcomed me, they wanted to talk to me and they sure as hell wanted to give us me earful, and I got it.

Q: Did you, while you were there early on, was Helmut Schmidt still seething from his not very happy relationship with Jimmy Carter? Was that still playing over again even though Carter had gone?

BEECROFT: I think Schmidt felt that he had been dealt two lousy hands in a row. First of all, as you say, he did not have a good relationship with Carter. Then Ronald Reagan came along, and as you can imagine there was absolutely nothing in common between them, no meeting of the minds. I remember Reagan's first official visit to Bonn, in 1982. Reagan took an affable, "call me Ron" approach, and you could just see Schmidt thinking: do I have to? What saved the day was Ambassador Arthur Burns. Burns was a man for whom Helmut Schmidt had enormous regard. What a resume: former chair of the Fed, professor at Columbia University, son of Austrian Jewish immigrants named Burnseig. He was an inspired choice for Bonn. He and Schmidt regarded themselves and each other a worthy intellectual and academic counterparts. Burns very deftly served as the interlocutor and go-between between Schmidt and Reagan. He was a marvelous boss. He ran embassy staff meetings like a graduate seminar. The one thing that he couldn't stand was if anyone tried to bluff him. Can you imagine being the Economic Counselor in an embassy run by Arthur Burns? One day, the Econ Counselor was offering some comments about the German economic situation, and Burns looked up and said, "Mr." X" - by the way, Burns talked a lot like W.C. Fields - "Mr. X, you don't know what you're talking about, do you?" There's this long silence. Then Burns says, "Well, I don't know the answer either, so why don't you go and find out for both of us?" Burns let him off the hook that way, but it was also a lesson: don't try and bullshit me, it's not going to work. I must say the atmosphere and morale in that embassy were fabulous. It demonstrated what you can achieve when you put the right political appointee in the right place.

Q: What was the feeling there, well, let's talk, let's not leave the parties yet. The extreme right, where were they coming? I mean there's rights and rights. In Germany at the time, where from the American perspective where were these parties coming from?

BEECROFT: There was the credible right and the incredible right. The credible would have been personified by Franz Josef Strauss and the CSU.

Q: The Bavarians.

BEECROFT: The Bavarian wing of the Christian Democrats. They always took positions to the right of the mainstream CDU - Christian Democratic Union, the Christian Democrats in the rest of Germany. The CSU had certain hobbyhorses that they rode very well. One of them was the Sudeten German issue. In 1980, there were a lot of Sudeten German refugees in places like Nürnberg and Bamberg, along the border with what was then Czechoslovakia, and they indulged in overheated, anti-Czech rhetoric and regularly made Prague nervous. No one dared really talk about a Sudeten crisis - they'd had one of those in 1938, you'll recall but the CSU got a lot of votes by never letting the Sudeten issue go away.

Q: Sort of like the Cuban Americans in the United States.

BEECROFT: That's right. There was an irridentism that never quite vanished. It is true that these people had been expelled en masse in 1945 -46 by the Czechs, with Soviet blessing and American acquiescence. They were still there, waiting for indemnification of some sort. So the CSU was clever at things like that. It's also the wing of the Christian Democrats that is almost 100% Catholic. In the rest of Germany, the CDU is a mix of Catholics and Protestants. Not in Bavaria. The right to hang a crucifix on a schoolroom wall was a lightning rod issue in Bavaria. So the CSU was on the conservative right wing, but still inside the tent. Then there were small parties such as the NDP, the National Democratic Party, and others that were vaguely neo-Nazi, but the Bonn government, with the support of all the major parties, kept a heavy thumb on them. Concerns were much more focused on the left-wing fringe, the Baader-Meinhof people, and the Greens to some extent. At that time, there were links between the more radical Greens and some of the terrorist fringe groups.

Q: Oh, the Baader-Meinhof was in full flower at that time?

BEECROFT: You remember General Kroesen? He was commander of USAREU U.S. Army Europe. In 1981 his Mercedes was hit in Heidelberg by a missile. It says something for the armor on that car he was not killed, even though the missile impacted right over the gas cap. The Baader-Meinhof gang and the Red Brigades were still serious threats. The more reasonable among them were drifting off into the left wing of the Greens. Eventually, some became not only housebroken, but part of the establishment.

Q: Were we seeing it? I mean how did we see the Green party at that time?

BEECROFT: It depends on who the "we" is. Those of us in the Embassy Political Section and the Station who were covering this on a regular basis saw the Greens as a party that had a pretty good chance of being in government by 1990. That's why it was so significant that we had the blessing of both Ambassadors Walter Stoessel and Arthur Burns when we reached out to the Greens. I remember phoning Petra Kelly; it was a cold call, the first time anyone at Embassy Bonn had attempted to contact her. Guess where she was working? At the Pension Office of the European Union in Brussels! So I called her there and said, Do you ever come to Bonn and if you do, can we meet? She said, "Well, I wondered just how long it would take for somebody from the Embassy to try to get in touch with me." We had lunch together the next time she was in Bonn, and that broke the ice. It was just a shot in the dark. The embassy was supportive, and Washington was neutral and a bit curious.

Q: Did you find that with the Green party that you might say there was almost a generational thing within our embassy? The '60s kids, I assume you were one?

BEECROFT: Yes, I was a '60s kid.

Q: A '60s kid from the United States would feel a certain amount of empathy for the Greens, was there?

BEECROFT: I couldn't put it better. That's exactly right. We younger Political Officers saw, as we put it in that cable, cracks in the plaster. We saw signs that the generation that experienced World War II was being pressed by its successors to move on. Helmut Schmidt used to talk about his military service, he was a gunner in the Second World War.

Q: He was in the Luftwaffe. I mean anti-aircraft.

BEECROFT: Schmidt was an anti-aircraft gunner in Hamburg. Helmut Kohl used to reminisce about the first time he saw chocolate; it was thrown from an American tank as it passed by. These people had grown up with experiences like that, but as you say, now we're talking about the successor generation and it was absolutely fascinating because after all, this was still Germany. The big debate going on in the early '80s, along with the question of deploying medium-range missiles, was whether there was a difference between the two German states on the one hand and the German nation on the other. The Germans love this kind of debate. The national issue had not died in Germany, and no one at that point could have predicted that it would be transformed in less than a decade. At that point, in the early 1980s, the question of "two states in one nation" was a big issue with the young people.

Q: Well, you're talking about East and West Germany.

BEECROFT: Absolutely. It seemed to everybody at that point that the GDR was going to be around for as long as any of us were alive.

Q: Was there concern at that time about somehow or another the Germans making a pact with the Soviets by united Germany meeting a neutral Germany?

BEECROFT: Not at that point. That had largely faded, well, primarily because Schmidt and the SPD had lost power. You did have a vocal pro-reunification wing of the SPD based in Berlin, centered around Willy Brandt, Egon Bahr, and Herbert Wehner. Bahr had been Brandt's right-hand man for years. He was a very clever, very smart man who had pushed hard for the pacts of the 1970s that the U.S. had finally bought into, which led to the recognition of the German Democratic Republic by the U.S., by France and by the UK. This had largely run its course by the early '80s, and as I say, when Kohl came in it just wasn't an issue anymore. Wehner was the SPD's grand old man in the Bundestag. He had spent World War II in Moscow, and was viewed with suspicion by Washington.

Q: When did the Soviets put in the SS-20s?

BEECROFT: They began shortly after Reagan came into office 1982, I think.

Q: Well, were we looking, we being the embassy and all seeing this, I mean it was designed to make the Europeans break away from the United States because get out of the war and they might be hitting the United States, might not retaliate because they weren't threatened. Were we seeing this as really serious or was this just another one of these ploys by the Soviets?

BEECROFT: It's very hard to gauge intentions. All we could do was gauge the reality. The reality was based on warning time. If you had an SS-20 in East Germany, it could hit anywhere in Western Europe in a matter of a couple of minutes, but it couldn't reach the U.S. It didn't have the range. So yes, Moscow's goal was to drive a wedge and be able to say to the French and the Belgians and the Dutch and the Brits, and the Germans of course, "See we now have a way of rendering you more vulnerable than the Americans are." You're right, deploying the SS-20 was an attempt to detach the Europeans from the Americans. Then there were these huge debates in the Bundestag, many of which I covered, on exactly this point. To this day, I have a poster in my basement which the CDU put out. It has a picture of a German house and says "It's better to have a Pershing II in the garden than an SS-20 coming in the roof."

Q: In Germany at the time what was the debate on, do we knuckle under to the Soviets or do we accept the Pershing II and the cruise missiles? It doesn't seem to be.

BEECROFT: No, the debate among Germans was really about how many more missiles there had to be in Germany. This was the question that was constantly being asked by the Left. How many more missiles do we need? Does this really increase our security or does it just make us more vulnerable? Western experts argued that the Soviet SS-20s were not just missiles like any others. The ones that were already there on both the NATO and Warsaw Pact sides - were extremely short-range, for warfighting purposes. The intercontinental missile ICBMs and SLBMs - were not in Europe at all, but on submarines or in silos in the U.S. or Central Asia. The SS-20's and Pershing 2's filled a gap between the short-range missiles and the ICBMs. This gets to be rather technical, especially when you're talking about as brutal as nuclear missiles, but it was all about warning time. As somebody once said, the question was really how many times you wanted to be able to make the rubble bounce. This was hair-trigger stuff.

Q: Where did you find, how about the FDP? Where did they, I mean they've always been sort of the swing party and making sure the Genscher's foreign ministry.

BEECROFT: Yes, the SPD and the CDU both referred to the FDP as "the pointer on the scale." They could swing in either direction politically, depending on whom they could better coalesce with to keep a share of the power. I remember a convention in Freiburg in the fall of '82, right after Schmidt had lost control of the SPD to Brandt. Sparks flew. The FDP has always survived by being able to go into coalition with either the SPD or the CDU/CSU. At that point, Genscher wanted to make sure that whoever won, the FDP would be able to jump in that direction. Basically he wanted the convention to decide not to decide. That's eventually what happened, because the FDP did change coalition partner which led directly to Schmidt's political downfall - but it took every bit of political influence Genscher had to bring that off.

Q: Was Helmut Kohl the head of the CDU?

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: How was he viewed? I mean I'm talking about before he got in.

BEECROFT: Helmut Kohl had been viewed in Washington as a sort of ponderous country bumpkin - a Rhinelander, from Mainz, in the area north of the French border on the west side of the Rhine. He had been the youngest everything in the history of the CDU - the youngest county chairman, the youngest Land governor. Because Kohl was always a heavyweight (literally), and because of his ponderous, heavily accented way of talking, he never seemed like a young man. That's why we sent our cable warning not to count Kohl out. This was at a time when a lot of people in the CDU were actually looking for a leader to succeed Kohl. Franz Josef Strauss had made his run for power in 1980, and had been humiliated by Schmidt. Kohl stepped forward, but it was never a warm, loving relationship between Kohl and much of the party base, especially the northern CDU, because Kohl was a southerner and a Catholic. The north of German Schleswig-Holstein, Bremen, Hamburg, Lower Saxony - is Protestant. The Protestants never really warmed to him, so he had a lot of work to do to win them over, and he did it. The guy is dogged as hell - a hard worker, determined, tireless, stubborn, maybe not with the last ounce of genius, but he would take a position and carry it come what may.

Q: Were we at this time playing any particular party or did we feel we had sort of supporters or whatever we wanted within various parties so that we didn't have to sort of tilt towards anybody?

BEECROFT: The U.S. Government watched developments in Germany very carefully in the early '80s. I can say that the Embassy generally had such good relations and such broad access across the board that for our part, we tended to be relaxed. Arthur Burns and Helmut Schmidt were extremely close. The Reagan Administration did not trust Schmidt, especially with this wrenching debate going on in the SPD about German identity and East-West German relations, which really did get foreign observers' attention, not least the French. I had good contacts at the French Embassy. We would confer quite frequently. The French were nervous - what's happening in Germany, what's happening to the Germans? Schmidt was a logical, analytical man. Brandt was an idealist, and the SPD is a romantic party to its soul. That's why Brandt won. Anyway, all this had Washington uneasy, but not just Washington, Paris, London and Moscow too.

Q: From your contacts, how did the French feel about the missile debate? They usually try to stick it to us in anything, but I would think this would be a little more serious.

BEECROFT: The French quietly supported us on Pershing-2 deployment. They never really came out publicly. I don't know what they might have said to the Germans, but at the end of the day the French understand these things. They realized that because of the deployment of the SS-20s there was an imbalance that could be dangerous. This is the kind of thing the French get right.

Q: Were you noticing something that I sort of feel, but I have nothing to back it up, but I'm 76 years old now. I served in Germany as an enlisted man in the Air Force in the early '50s. My first post was Frankfurt and by that time I think a third of the Foreign Service was in Germany in all our consulates and all that, but as time has gone on, fewer and fewer Americans have reason to go to Germany. The German language isn't as popular anymore and if you're going on vacation, you don't go to Germany, you go to England, you go to France, you go to Italy, you go to Spain. This means that Germany you just don't, those ties, I mean was that beginning to be apparent when people or were the people still able to call on their German experience often through the military?

BEECROFT: It hadn't really hit home yet. There may have been a little fraying around the edges, but it was not something one noticed. There were still lots of PXs and big and small bases everywhere, not just big places like Ramstein or Frankfurt but in villages like Bad Aibling, little places. And of course, and all this was especially interesting when you dealt with the SPD. You dealt with some SPD Germans who were, if not anti-American, at least anti-Reagan and made no bones about it, but when you talked to some SPD mayor whose town had maybe 150 jobs that depended on that local base, suddenly he loved all of us. No, the bonds were still there, although I have to say that Reagan was a lightning rod - just as we now hear Europeans say "Well, we're not anti-American, but we don't like George Bush" - you heard the same kind of argument "We're not anti-American, but we don't understand Reagan."

Q: Yes. When Reagan went over the first time, how did that go?

BEECROFT: Oh boy. I can remember that very well.

Q: Was that the Bitburg time?

BEECROFT: No, Bitburg happened after I left, in 1985.

Q: Okay, let's talk about when you were there.

BEECROFT: Reagan came to the Bonn Economic Summit 1982. I still have the T-shirt. Again, Arthur Burns was crucial. There were demonstrations, big ones. Harry Belafonte sang in front of 100,000 people, mainly students, in a big field not far from our house: "Lay down your neutron bomb..." Reagan was a lightning rod. He made no public appearances. He of course met with Schmidt. I was not present for that meeting; I wish I had been. There was no particular warmth or symbiosis between Schmidt and Reagan. They were just too different.

Q: What about your contacts in your dealing with universities and students and faculties because so often in these European universities the faculties almost are dominated by Marxists. It's a good philosophy to play with if you don't have to live with the consequences.

BEECROFT: Yes. I made a lot of university appearances - Hamburg, Kiel, Bremen, Bonn, Heidelberg, Freiburg, Munich. One of the things that struck me even then, and it's a lot worse now, is that I never met a professor or student who didn't believe he or she was an expert on the United States. But very few of them had either been there or taken any courses on the U.S., because courses on American civilization weren't widely offered. The same holds true for France, by the way.

Q: They could see the movies and that certainly gave them a clear picture of life in the United States.

BEECROFT: Correct, but only to the extent that movies aren't caricatures of reality. I can remember one particular television program that had a huge impact. It was called "The Day After" and it was set in Lawrence, Kansas.

Q: Lawrence, Kansas, oh, yes, I recall.

BEECROFT: After a nuclear exchange. It had a huge impact in Germany.

Q: Jason Robards was in it.

BEECROFT: Exactly. Interestingly enough, I had just sent a couple of young SPD Bundestag deputies on Leader Grant trips to the U.S., and among the places they went, at their request, was Lawrence, Kansas. Lawrence is a university town and these were left-wing deputies, and of course they were intellectuals and so they loved Lawrence, Kansas. They were made honorary members of the local Indian tribe, and they talked with people on the campus, and came back to Germany totally in love with Lawrence, Kansas, but it started with this TV program. For that generation, the fraying around the edges really became obvious. That generation, which had come of age after the '60s, had no recollection of World War II or the immediate postwar years. For them, the United States was a caricature. They didn't understand what made us tick, but thought they did.

Q: Was Dynasty a big thing up there?

BEECROFT: Oh God yes. J.R. Dallas.

Q: Dallas, I mean.

BEECROFT: Dallas. They were obsessed with Dallas.

Q: I think if I recall Europe kind of shut down on the days that they were showing it, but to most Americans it was a nice soap opera, but nothing special.

BEECROFT: Oh, the Germans loved Dallas. Another stereotype of what the Greens would call "rapacious capitalism." But Germans were fascinated with it.

Q: Well, were there any particular, what about sort of the bottom line of the terrorist thing, was this a problem for you all?

BEECROFT: No, not really. It seems almost naïf now. Every morning we would drive our cars right through the Embassy front gate and around the circle without slowing down, past the front entrance, and park in the Embassy lot in the back of the building. There was a guy out there in a uniform, but he seldom stopped cars or intervened. These were rent-a-guards. After the attempted hit on General Kroesen there may have been some tightening up on the military side, but certainly nothing that affected the Embassy staff directly. Even on the military side, my family and I would drive south to the Alps on vacation, and we would always stop halfway the first night, at Patrick Henry Village in Heidelberg, because we liked to spend the evening in Heidelberg. There was a military guest house at Patrick Henry Village that Foreign Service people could use. You'd call in advance to reserve, and park right in front. If there was a threat, it was seen as a very specific, aimed at senior officials and economic figures. You'll remember that they attacked the president of the Bundesbank.

Q: Yes and I think a publisher, too.

BEECROFT: That's true.

Q: What about, this is a time I was in Naples around this time and this is a period when there was a lot of concern in Italy about European communism and you know, a different face, how about the KPD?

BEECROFT: The KPD, the German Communist Party, just didn't have any traction. There was no particular interest. What little interest there might have been disappeared when the Greens came along. The Greens acted as a magnet for intellectuals and the left fringe. If you went to East Germany, which I did on occasion, the SED, which was a forced coalition of communists and non-communists, held power. The KPD was just not a factor in either state.

Q: Interesting, isn't it? What about relations with East Germany when you were there?

BEECROFT: This was a point when some serious scandals began emerging. Willy Brandt's secretary turned out to be an East German spy, and Herbert Wehner, the grand old man of the SPD in the Bundestag, was revealed exposed as having trained in Moscow during World War II. Wehner had the political good sense to die at about that time, so he was never really dragged through the political mud. I do not believe to this day that Wehner was a communist, not that what I believe matters. Egon Bahr, Willy Brandt's closest advisor, was also put under the microscope. What fuelled this was a kind of fascination in the FRG with this Doppelgänger, the other Germany. You sure as heck didn't see many people going to East Germany for vacation. It was an interesting phenomenon, and no one saw a quick end to it.

Q: Were we the United States suffering the delusion then that East Germany was much more of a mighty power economically?

BEECROFT: You bet.

Q: It turned out to be, talk about a rubber crutch. It's awful.

BEECROFT: I remember people, serious people who should have known better - Arthur Burns was not one of the declaring solemnly and with ill-concealed admiration that because East Germany was the 10th largest economic power in the world, in a state the size of Ohio, it showed that even the Germans could make communism work. It was trendy to remind people that Karl Marx had never considered Russia as a candidate for communism; he had viewed Germany as his candidate for communism. Then I remember going to East Berlin and looking around and saying to myself, this is the world's 10th economic power? You'd look in vain for West German-style consumer goods in the stores or something to buy to take back home. Fortunately, I like music. As you know, one of the few things the communists managed to do really well was to keep culture at a high level, if you could accept the fact that even culture would be given a Marxist tinge. I would go to the Eterna Record Store on Alexanderplatz, the heart of East Berlin, and for less than a dollar - a couple of East German marks - I could get the most wonderful LPs. I still have some, recordings you couldn't find in the West, often derived from tapes taken over from the Soviet Melodiya label, but pressed on real vinyl, not cheap sandpaper plastic like the Russians did it. Recordings of Kurt Masur conducting the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, for example, well before Masur ever dreamt of becoming a political figure, after the Wall came down and he became conductor of the New York Philharmonic. Great stuff.

Once I went over to East Berlin from West Berlin, and being a diplomat I could walk unchallenged through the Wall at Checkpoint Charlie, which was always an eerie experience. My alarm clock had broken so I thought okay, let's go to the people's department store on Alexanderplatz and see what alarm clocks they have. I went up to the counter and the woman was apologetic because she obviously saw I was not from the GDR. She showed me one and said, "This is all we have." What she had was a clock in a cheap plastic case with wind-up tick-tock works, but it had an electric-powered buzzer, so you put a double-A battery in this thing and it made an infernal racket. You could hear it ticking at night, very loud. Then there would be this pop and then it would go buzz. It was amazingly bad hybrid technology. The tick-tock part broke in a year or two and I threw the clock away. I could understand why the woman was apologetic. This was the best they had in the people's capital of the GDR.

Q: I think I've done a lot of soul searching, but how we brought ourselves to feel that this GDR and the Soviet Union was a powerful state, militarily, yes, but if you can't produce civilian goods, what are you?

BEECROFT: Sure. The city of Bitterfeld was a good example. It was the big chemical-producing center of the GDR. It's going to take a century to completely clean up the polluted ground water and soil in places like Bitterfeld. We Americans are very good at worst-casing. Our intelligence people always worst-case, as do the military. There is no nuance. You get this picture of your opponents as 16 feet tall, and they knew they weren't, but their own propaganda was never going to admit that.

Q: Speaking of intelligence how well do you feel you were served by the CIA or other intelligence agencies because Germany was just covered with people I mean every other person, it stems from right after the war.

BEECROFT: All I can say is that whenever I went to large receptions, you would inevitably bump into a lot of Agency people there. After the GDR opened an embassy in Bonn they of course had an annual "National Day" reception, and our Agency friends were all over it. You knew from looking at their reporting that they were paying money for what you got for free. As a taxpayer that sort of annoyed me, but they were busy and they usually described themselves as belonging to the State Department.

Q: Yes, this is a picture I get so often at a place where we probably had too many and they were tripping over each other.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: It's a nice place to be.

BEECROFT: Yes, Bonn was a fine place to live. A great place for your kids to go to school and grow up. We all loved Bonn.

Q: Did the Bundestag members get over to the States fairly frequently?

BEECROFT: All the time, yes. Not only the Bundestag members, but also the Land governors, the mayors - the mayor of Bremen, Hans Koschnick, was in Washington frequently, he spoke excellent English. In the late Carter era, a decision had been made to close down the U.S. Consulate General in Bremen, which had been rebuilt after the war. Bremen was the major port for the entry for defense supplies and materiel, and it mattered to us. Washington had argued that we didn't need that Consulate any more because we had a much larger Consulate General in Hamburg, was only 50 kilometers away. We had this purpose-built consulate general building in Bremen. You may remember the style; our consulates general in Germany were very Bauhaus-inspired, on stilts with glass walls.

Q: Yes, I was in Frankfurt.

BEECROFT: Yes, they were all on the same model. So in this case, Mayor Hans Koschnick went to Washington and pled his case for reopening the Bremen Consulate General on Capitol Hill. He knew exactly what to do. When it's about money, the Mayor of Bremen knew that you didn't go to the State Department, you went to the Hill.

Q: Hell no.

BEECROFT: That's right. He won his case and Congress instructed the Secretary to reopen the Consulate. In the meantime, the building had been taken over by some bank. If I recall correctly, Koschnick chased the bank out because he wanted the Americans back. So we assigned a new Consul General. This would have been in '82. We also got the elevator working again. That was a big problem because the elevator had been put in after the war, when everything we did in Germany was in feet and inches. Of course everything in Germany is metric, so we had to custom-build the replacement elevator. Anyway, the new Consul General came in, and within a year was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He left, and soon after passed away. Shortly thereafter, Washington closed it down again. So it was kind of a phantom rebirth for one last hurrah. Sad.

Q: Yes. Well, is there anything else we should cover on this?

BEECROFT: On Germany? Well, just that my family and I left Bonn in '83. If anybody had told me then that in six years the Wall would fall, that there would be ferment in the GDR, that East Germans would transit the border in large numbers unopposed from Hungary to Austria, and that the German Democratic Republic would be absorbed by the same Helmut Kohl who was already Chancellor in 1983, I would have said you're out of your mind.

Q: Even much closer. Did Burns see this though? Was he looking at things at a little longer view?

BEECROFT: I don't think anybody foresaw that, and I don't mean that in any way critically of Ambassador Burns. He was a prince, but no...If there was any concern, it was how, after the unpleasantness of the missile deployment debate, we could get things back on an even keel.

Q: In '83, whither?

BEECROFT: I had bid on Oslo, as the political-military officer. I speak Norwegian. My wife is first generation Norwegian-American. Embassy Oslo wanted me, and dais as much to State. But the Department of State, in its infinite wisdom said, no, we think it's time for you to see the world. So off we went to Cairo. It was for me personally and professionally a real turning point. In retrospect I'm glad it happened, but at the time it seemed like a really weird thing.

Q: You were in Cairo from when to when?

BEECROFT: I was there for two years, '83 to '85.

Q: What were you doing there?

BEECROFT: I was the Egypt-Israel officer in the Political Section.

Q: Let's go back, had you had any Middle East experience?

BEECROFT: Zero.

Q: Because this is an extremely tricky thing. I would have thought there would have been people standing in line who had served in garden spots like Sanaa.

BEECROFT: Go figure. I think some of it had to do with the fact that Roy Atherton had heard of me, I don't know how, and that his wife Betty, who was a very strong influence, knew my wife, Mette.

Q: She was madam ambassador.

BEECROFT: As I said, she knew my wife.

Q: She had her own office.

BEECROFT: Yes. She had her own office in the Chancery, which one day literally collapsed into the bathroom downstairs - no, the bathroom upstairs collapsed into her office. Anyway, in the summer of '83 we went off to Egypt. We used to joke that it was an easy transition, because we went from a place where it always rained and everything worked to the exact opposite.

Q: So, how did you see American Egyptian affairs at that time in '83?

BEECROFT: Camp David was signed in 1978, and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979. My focus was on the bilateral relationship between Egypt and Israel. By 1983, it was clear that a chill was settling over the relationship. President Sadat died in '81 - assassinated. It was Sadat who had been the driving force on the Egyptian side. His successor, Hosni Mubarak, didn't have the same investment, either political or emotional, in the process. The result was the so-called cold peace, which is still in effect. Egypt sees it as very much in its interest not to have problems with Israel, but neither are they going to bend over backwards one iota more than necessary to create a warm relationship. The Palestinian issue is a key reason. But so was Egypt's desire to get back on good terms with the rest of the Arab world after signing the peace treaty. You may remember that Egypt was suspended by the Arab League in 1979, and the Arab League moved its headquarters moved from Cairo to Tunis until 1989, when the suspension was lifted. That was another reason. Egypt always wants it both ways. And they receive over a billion, probably closer to two billion dollars a year from us.

Q: Because Camp David had set up the pattern of balancing, Israel gets so much, Egypt gets so much.

BEECROFT: Not quite as much.

Q: But still it's a very big subsidy.

BEECROFT: Nothing to sneeze at.

Q: I mean it keeps them quiet. Were you there, you must have been there, there must have still been the repercussions of the Israel invasion of Lebanon and Shatila and Sabra massacres.

BEECROFT: That happened the year before I got there.

Q: Yes, but I mean that must have been reverberating, wasn't it?

BEECROFT: Oh, sure. I mean it just reinforced the overall stereotypes, in the press in particular. The Egyptian press depicted Israel as not a desirable partner or somebody you wanted to get too close to, but Egyptians were happy to have Israeli tourists come to Egypt and spend their money, which they did - as we saw only a few days ago, have continued to do. I'm referring here to the tragedy at the Hilton Hotel at Taba, Egypt, south of Eilat. We ought to talk about Taba. I was involved in the negotiations that eventually returned that slice of land, with its Hilton Hotel, to Egypt. After the peace treaty, the Israelis left the Sinai in stages that had been carefully negotiated by Kissinger and his team as confidence-building measures. The idea was that Egypt would fill in as the Israelis moved out. But when the time came for the final withdrawal to the actual Israeli border in '79, the Israelis didn't withdraw from Taba. If you draw a line from Gaza southeast across the peninsula, it's straight as an arrow. Then, when it gets to this final ridge before reaching the Gulf of Aqaba or Gulf of Eilat, depending on which name you like better, it could go one of two ways - either slightly north along one ridgeline or slightly south along the next one. The Israelis claimed to have discovered an old British or Ottoman survey map that showed the line bending south. Now, as coincidence would have it, the hotel had been built after 1967, and it was owned by Israelis, the discovery of the map was fortuitous from the Israeli point of view. Needless to say, the Egyptians raised holy hell. Several years later we brokered a long series of Taba negotiations that went on for several years. All this was about a pie-shaped slice of land about the size of Central Park, with the crust being the seashore. It took five years to resolve all the issues and return Taba to the Egyptians, with special access rights for Israelis. At one point, the Saudis got involved and proposed to buy out the hotel. I'm sure a lot of interesting money changed hands.

Q: We're talking about a hotel within a week or so a car bomb went right into the lobby drove in and blew up, killed over 30 people and it was linked to Al Qaeda. The Israelis have been going to that area, have all left it.

BEECROFT: They'll come back. This is basically an area that the Israelis themselves developed. Taba, Nuweiba, Dahab, all the way down to Sharm el-Sheikh and Ras Mohammed at the south tip, these were Bedouin villages developed as resorts under the Israeli occupation, and the Israelis still love it.

But let's go back to Cairo. Yes it was something of a stunning change from Bonn. For the first couple of months, while we were trying to find a place to live, we lived in the Ramses Hilton Hotel, a high-rise hotel along the Nile. I remember looking down on the roofs of Cairo, covered in trash, including the Arab League building next door, roof all covered in trash, and thinking with a good German perspective, wouldn't the Germans go nuts with this much trash? You soon begin to understand that the Egyptians take very seriously the fact that they've had 4,000 years of history and don't care to be told how to suck eggs by anybody, thank you, and that they have their own agenda and they do not see themselves as just Arabs like the others. The direct link to Egyptian history is real. You also have this interesting minority, the Copts. The word Coptic goes back to the Greek word *Gypt* - the original Egyptians. Their liturgical language is derived from ancient Pharaonic Egyptian, and they're Christians. These are fascinating people. Boutros Ghali was a Copt. Boutros is Petrus; he's Peter. The two most common names in the Coptic community are Boutros and Morcos - Mark. They have their own Pope, Shenouda IV. Whatever their true numbers, official Egyptian population statistics always show them at around ten per cent of the total.

Q: Yes, it's like old Lebanon when they always had made sure that they weren't going to be underrepresented, I mean a guarantee of representation.

BEECROFT: Exactly. This was for us an assignment of discovery and we were hooked. It was not always easy, but our son Christopher was at a boarding school in Connecticut our daughter Pamela was with us. We lived out in Ma'adi, which had been a British elite suburb and still had some wonderful plane trees and jacaranda trees that would turn great colors. Ma'adi was about a 45 minutes' drive south of Cairo, right along the Nile, and it was only that long because the traffic was so horrendous. It was a very busy time and we quickly learned that weekends didn't have to be Saturdays and Sundays. For us they were Fridays and Saturdays. The other part of the job, in addition to getting to know the people in the Egyptian Foreign Ministry and the presidency who covered Israel, was to get to know the staff at the Israeli Embassy - which had only recently opened - and the Israeli Cultural Center, which was far more effective in reaching out to Egyptians than the Embassy. The director of the Cultural Center was an professor named Shimon Shamir, and his wife Daniela, also an academic, was for all intents and purposes his co-equal. They reached out to the Egyptian academic community, which was not under the same strictures as much of the rest of society. Interestingly enough, almost a decade later, I helped the Israelis open their Embassy in Amman, and guess who the first ambassador was? Shimon Shamir. A marvelous man. He succeeded in a very low-key way in making the two parties more comfortable in talking with each other. That was not easy, but he and Daniela did it.

I also covered the so-called MFO, the Multinational Force and Observers, who patrolled the Sinai as part of the Camp David Accords. Drove all over the Sinaan amazing and often beautiful place, but watch out for the land mines.

Q: In your job, what were your relations with our embassy in Tel Aviv?

BEECROFT: I drove up to Embassy Tel Aviv periodically. My predecessor in Cairo had been transferred to Tel Aviv and we became counterparts and soon good friends.

Q: Who was that?

BEECROFT: Dan Kurtzer, who is now the Ambassador in Tel Aviv. Dan and I were in constant touch and we coordinated very closely. He came back to Cairo a couple of times while I was there. He loved Egypt, and served there as U.S. Ambassador before going on to do the same job in Israel. He was very successful in both posts, which speaks volumes about his professional skill and human warmth. I went to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem a half dozen times from Cairo. Perhaps you know about this funny relationship that exists there - the American Embassy in Tel Aviv is not responsible for Jerusalem, the West Bank or Gaza. Our Consulate General in Jerusalem is, and the Consul General is, de facto, equivalent to an Ambassador.

Q: Did you run into any differences between our embassy in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem at this period of time?

BEECROFT: I can't say that they affected me, but the short answer is yes. This has been a subject of tension as long as the arrangement has been in place, and it's been in place since Israel became independent in the late '40s. Again, it's a Consulate General, but it's not subordinate to the Embassy. It's independent. The consul general is in effect our Ambassador to Palestine. As I'm sure you are aware, there are occasional initiatives in the U.S. Congress to transfer the Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and they've been quietly turned aside by a whole series of Presidents, because if that happened we would in effect be prejudging the outcome of the peace process.

Q: How aggressive did you find the Egyptians on trying to take care of Egyptian Israeli relations?

BEECROFT: Not very. They saw it more as a holding action than anything else. By the way, when I went to Tel Aviv I always made it a point to call at the Egyptian Embassy. It was not exactly a beehive of activity. They saw it as necessary to maintain the cold peace, not to develop a closer and more active bilateral relationship with Israel. The Egyptians in Tel Aviv didn't see that as their job description.

Q: What about once the Sinai force was set in place and all was this, I mean this had almost run itself, were there any real problems there? Just every once in a while some individuals get too pushy or something like that?

BEECROFT: Even that didn't happen a whole lot. These guys knew when they had it good. The Multinational Force and Observers must be one of the great jobs in anybody's military. Once in a while a camel steps on a tank mine or, unfortunately, a vehicle may drive over one, but other than that kind of thing, the MFO's job is to keep anything from happening. It was established by the United States after the UN, in a of pique, decided not to extend its Sinai Field Mission. It's a successful coalition of the willing, including the U.S., Canada, Australia, Fiji, Colombia, France, Hungary, Italy, New Zealand, Uruguay and Norway. It oversaw the withdrawal of Israel from the Sinai, and since then it polices or patrols the Sinai to help stabilize the Egyptian-Israeli relationship. It's still operating to this day.

Q: When you ere there, were you looking at the other Arab countries trying to screw up the relationship between Egypt and Israel or not?

BEECROFT: Not overtly. I can remember even then being at Cairo airport to meet people and seeing literally hundreds of people, Egyptians working in the Gulf, coming back with their television sets and refrigerators. At that point, even 20 years ago, the Gulf was a place for Egyptians to go and work because there weren't enough jobs at home, and there still aren't. Occasionally Qadhafi would prove a nuisance and make trouble on the Western border that would spin the Egyptians up, but it never amounted to much. No, Egypt has always has seen itself as being in a class of one.

Q: How did we view Mubarak at this time? He was pretty, I mean he'd been vice president and fairly new on the scene.

BEECROFT: That's right. We generally viewed him as somebody we could work with, and we did work with him. We had congressmen and senators coming to Cairo all the time. I'm trying to remember whether Schultz ever came when I was there. I don't think he did, but other high-ranking people did come. Assistant Dick Murphy was there frequently. I remember Teddy Kennedy and Dick Lugar coming on a visit. The general feeling was that we had lost a man we respected, Sadat, but Mubarak was turning out to be all right. Then and now, he keeps a heavy hand on the political process. The Egyptian Parliament was very subservient. The press was subtly but indisputably under control. There's no doubt as to who was in charge. It was true then and it's true now.

Q: How about the universities? Were they I mean you've got two things. One sort of a Marxist thing, but the other one, Islamic fundamentalists. How did we see that at the time?

BEECROFT: Islamic fundamentalism was not nearly the issue that it is now. Cairo is home to Al-Azhar University, which is also the closest thing to the Vatican in the Sunni Muslim world. It's the oldest operating university in the world - goes back to the 8th Century. If we wanted to talk to the Imam of Al-Azhar, no problem, we'd go talk to him. If I wanted to go to the University of Cairo and meet with students - not the American University, the Egyptian University - I'd do it. The situation wasn't as nearly as polarized and generally hostile then as it is now. There are a couple of Shia mosques in Cairo, but as I said, the Egyptians are very effective at keeping such things under tight control. We had a political officer - I won't name him, he was one of those who had gotten out of Tehran at the start of the hostage crisis, thanks to the Canadians. This guy spoke absolutely flawless street Arabic, which was a rarity and unfortunately still is. He would put on a galabeya on Friday and attend prayers at mosques we had an eye on. He was a chain smoker, with a tatty mustache and he fit right in. He would come back and debrief who was preaching what in the sermons, something that our Agency friends wouldn't dare try. We were keeping a close eye on what was being said, because there was some ugly rhetoric aimed at the U.S. and Israel. In my position as Egypt-Israel Officer, that was something that we wanted to keep an eye on.

Q: Did you feel at all the hand of AIPAC, the American Israeli whatever it was called?

BEECROFT: AIPAC, the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee. You would have a constant stream of AIPAC-organized congressional delegations that would go to Egypt first and then go on to Israel. They wouldn't go to Israel first and then come to Egypt, because this was still the time when a passport with an Israeli stamp in it still ran the risk of being turned away at Egyptian customs, even though there was a peace treaty. AIPAC was and still is quite critical of Egypt for keeping the peace cold. I'm sure it was beneficial and educational for congressmen and senators who had never been to the region, but you can assume that the Israeli public relations machine was a lot more effective than the Egyptian one.

Q: What was your impression of all our AID work that was going on at the time? How useful was it?

BEECROFT: We had the largest AID mission in the world in Cairo. By the way, Embassy Cairo was also the largest American Embassy in the world at the time, about 2,000 people. I've got to tell you an anecdote, one of the great AID-related anecdotes. We lived Ma'adi, as I said. In the same apartment building lived a guy who was the chief of USAID population program. I bumped into him one weekend in the hall of our apartment and he was in hysterics. I said, "What's going on?" He said, "Well, do you remember that village up-country that we'd been using as a sort of test site for population initiatives? Well, we heard that there were a lot of people getting sick, so I went up to check it out. First I went and talked with the women. I said, are you feeling all right? I hear there's illness. The women said, oh, no, we're fine. We have these little dispensers and every day we take a pill and then for a week each month we stop. But you should talk to our husbands, they're not feeling well." He goes to talk to the husbands, asks if they're having problems? "Oh, terrible problems. We don't feel well. Our stomachs hurt all the time" "Well, what are you doing?" The response: "Well, you know, our wives take these pills every day, and every day we swallow one of these little rubber things..."

Q: Oh, God.

BEECROFT: I'm not making this up. They got guidance.

Q: That could be terribly dangerous.

BEECROFT: It could be terribly dangerous, yes.

Q: Oh, my God, swallowing condoms.

BEECROFT: That's right, they were swallowing condoms, once a day.

Q: We had these huge things, putting in new sewers, doing this and that.

BEECROFT: Sewers and chicken farms.

Q: Yes

BEECROFT: Those were the big installations. We had terrible trouble with the chicken farms because in a place like Egypt, unless they're air conditioned the chickens die, and chickens were dying by the thousands. Things kept happening. You mentioned sewers. The sewer system in Cairo was put in under the British in 1915. That was when the population of Cairo was a million and a half. It's now, no one knows, somewhere between 16 and 19 million. Yes, we were desperately, literally trying to stem the tide and failing. The problem in Egypt then and now was that things break and there is not a whole lot of technical acumen. This is not the Egyptian forte. The Egyptians are great at improvising their way to survival, and they've been doing it for a long time. But they don't like to take advice. They've been around a lot longer than we have, and they want you to know it. Same goes for the Egyptian military, by the way.

Q: I understand with the military that they have the problem that in the American system what you do is you teach a sergeant how to do this. The sergeant then goes out and teaches four or five other sergeants.

BEECROFT: Right.

Q: But, there if you teach a sergeant how to do it, he won't teach anybody else because by knowing it that's his rice bowl.

BEECROFT: That's correct, and another problem is that in the Egyptian military, there aren't many sergeants to start with. Our sergeants have real responsibilities, their sergeants - the few that they have - are basically flunkies. The people who "know things" have to be commissioned officers, and they're generally not highly motivated.

Q: That's the Soviet system, too.

BEECROFT: That's right. We would send in experts, let's say, I don't know, we were at that point handing out a lot of tanks. We would send in tech sergeants who had solid training in tank maintenance, and the Egyptian officers, who would be doing the same job, were offended and wouldn't deal with them because they were enlisted men.

Q: Were there any development incidents or anything else like that while you were there that you can think of?

BEECROFT: You mean security-related?

Q: Well, almost anything, you know?

BEECROFT: Well, incidents. The Shah was brought for burial in his mausoleum- mosque, I remember that. But overall, it was a relatively quiet time in terms of dramatic developments. You could tell that things were not getting better in terms of bilateral relations with Israel. We worked very hard on the Taba negotiations, alternating between Cairo and Tel Aviv. By the way, when the Taba negotiations were first held in Tel Aviv, the Israelis - whether by design or not - decided to put the Egyptians up at the Hotel Sharon and the Egyptians refused. Even then Ariel Sharon was a lightning rod, so they had to move the talks. It was a sort of a post-euphoric period, a long hard slog, in hopes that the Palestinian issue, which was and is still the great dividing issue, could be resolved. Now, it's also true that those of us who worked these issues felt that the Palestinian issue was being used partly as an excuse, a means of deflecting attention from a whole raft of serious internal problems inside Egypt and the Arab world. Every university graduate in Egypt at that time, and it may still be true, had a guaranteed government job. You can just imagine that with a weak private sector, you had hundreds of thousands of functionaries doing nothing and getting paid for it. Economically, things were not good.

There were problems related to the Aswan High Dam. The turbines the Soviets had built and installed in the '50s began breaking down. The blades were made of inferior steel and they were cracking. We got General Electric in to replace the turbine engines. By the way, that dam is always a quiet concern, not only because the silt that used to replenish the fields is no longer washing downstream each year, but because the dam was built to Soviet specifications, not American. We had a different plan. Dulles came to Egypt in 1954 with his own plan, which Nasser rejected. It proposed a series of low dams that would have allowed for silt to come downstream at a controlled rate. The problem now is that silt is building up against the dam. This has some people worried about the stability of the dam. You have this huge lake, Lake Nasser, behind it and you're only 100 miles west of the great Syrian-African rift that runs under the Red Sea. There are frequent earthquakes. The nightmare scenario is a wall of water sweeping down the Nile Valley. I don't know whether that's still on anybody's agenda, but it's an interesting thing to keep in mind.

Q: Okay. Well, a question did you ever feel any pressure that you're supposed to put on a smiley face on Egyptian Israeli relations or not?

BEECROFT: No. Not with Roy Atherton or Nick Veliotis as Ambassadors, and Dick Murphy in Washington as Assistant Secretary. Atherton was there my first year, and Nick the second. I'd known Nick slightly before and Atherton was a prince, a legend, a total professional. Both of them were as fair and honest and objective as one could hope for. Nick was more of a cheerleader. Atherton was a political analyst to his fingertips, but both of them were integrity personified. The DCM was Henry Precht, who was another old hand in the region.

Q: Were there any reflections of the Iranian Iraqi situation?

BEECROFT: No. It got relatively little attention in Cairo, and the general feeling was one of satisfaction that these two rogue elephants were battling it out and both weakening themselves. On the other hand, the bombing of the Osirak reactor by the Israelis obviously got attention in Egypt.

Q: Yes, I guess the war just, it had started, hadn't it?

BEECROFT: The war had started, but it was far away. And you didn't have CNN then. CNN has made such a huge difference.

Q: Oh, God yes.

BEECROFT: One thing you asked about: smiley-faces. It struck me, especially coming from the European bureau, was that unlike EUR, NEA was not in control of U.S. policy in its area of responsibility. NEA was the executor, but not the inventor. Policy decisions came from higher levels of the Executive Branch, and from Congress. There was an internal political U.S. political dynamic that bore directly on our Middle East policy, which was not the case in EUR, where there was a broad consensus. EUR was in charge of U.S. foreign policy for Europe. And of course RPM, EUR/RPM, the NATO affairs office, was de facto a bureau unto itself. That was not the case in NEA. It still isn't.

Q: One last thing, what about, how did Betty Atherton operate?

BEECROFT: Oh, Betty was - wow, what a pistol. She's wonderful. She had her own office in the chancery. This was the old Embassy, a charming old palace which used to have a direct view right down to the Nile. Unfortunately, that view had since been blocked by high-rise buildings that had been built between the Chancery and the Nile. In 1984, construction had already begun on the new high-rise Embassy complex, so nobody was making too much of an effort on upkeep at the old Chancery, which explains why the ceiling fell in on Betty's desk one day. Fortunately she wasn't there, but she was a driving force as a cheerleader for the Embassy, focusing on morale issues. Remember, this was our largest Embassy then, 2,000 people, and Cairo isn't the easiest place to live. Betty knew that my wife Mette had been one of the co-founders of the Family Liaison Office in the late '70's, and they worked closely together. Mette played a crucial role in developing the Ma'adi Center. Before that, there had been no community center and since so many people lived in Ma'adi - that's where the school was - the Center was desperately needed.

Q: Right. Okay. Well, Bob, we'll stop and we'll pick this up, would it be '85 is it?

BEECROFT: This would be '85. The summer of '85.

Q: Where did you go?

BEECROFT: I went back to Washington, where I had spent only four years and a few months since becoming an FSO in 1971.

Q: So, what were you doing in Washington?

BEECROFT: I was the Officer-in-Charge of Federal German Affairs.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up then.

BEECROFT: Okay.

Q: Today is the 26th of October, 2004. Bob, you had something to say about Arthur Burns?

BEECROFT: Right. Since we're talking about federal German affairs, I mentioned earlier, when we were talking about Bonn, that Dr. Burns focused on young people and on the successor generation of politicians. Actually he was a role model for me in that regard. One of the things he did was to invite the head of the Green Party, Petra Kelly to a series of lunches. Petra spoke very good English. Sadly, she died in the late '80'murdered by her lover Gert Bastian, a retired Bundeswehr general. I was included at these lunches, since I had made the initial contact with her and we were quite close. I'll never forget that first luncheon, in the Ambassador's private dining room at Embassy Bonn. Imagine: Dr. Burns, the pipe-smoking professor and former head of the Federal Reserve Board, very Socratic and analytical. Petra is his exact opposite - impulsive, mercurial, emotional. She's declaiming about economics, which is something of a profile in courage, lecturing Arthur Burns on economics. She's talking about how all of these big factories were bad for the environment and we needed to get back to small factories, and she pointed to the Chinese model of steel mills in back yards.

Q: Oh, God.

BEECROFT: Burns, who spoke like W.C. Fields, looked kindly at her and said, "Miss Kelly, do you know how much pollution steel mills in back yards produce? Do you know how much it costs just to put a steel mill in a back yard?" Of course she didn't have a clue. This was just idealism rampant. She fumbled around, and he was very nice would have been less forgiving with his own staff, that's for sure. He was quite paternal with her. Anyway, that was the end of her spiel. He responded with a tutorial about the need to right-size any given industry in order to balance minimal pollution with maximum productivity, and so on. She actually listened, which was hard for her to do because she was a nonstop talker. After she left, Burns came back in. He had a sly smile on his face and he said, "She is not unintelligent, but she has an untrained mind." I thought: bingo. That was Petra. Burns was wonderful.

Q: Now, we come back to what, '85?

BEECROFT: '85.

Q: You went to Washington, which you say was an unknown country. I mean all of a sudden you find yourself; was there an adjustment learning to live in a bureaucracy, before we get to the actual German affairs, but just being effective and understanding who did what to whom and how the bureaucracy works.

BEECROFT: The only jobs I'd had in the State Department which were really full-time were '75 - '76, when I was Special Assistant to the Deputy Secretary, and then in PM, when I divided my time between Washington and Geneva. In D, I was in this rarefied seventh-floor environment, detached from the bureaucratic game-playing of the building; basically, you could get whatever you needed from the bureaus. This was very different. Now I was dealing with all the players around town who had a stake in German affairs. That was a lot of players. This was the mid-'80s. If you asked any Germany-watcher how long it would be before the wall came down, the answer would have been decades. We didn't realize it, but we were approaching a historic turning of the page. We were at the very end of the Cold War period without of course knowing as much. We were still dealing regularly with the Treasury Department because of Germany's economic might; with Defense, naturally, because we had all those soldiers and all that armor and all those nukes, plus the recently-deployed Pershing- 2s IRBM's in Germany. It was also a multilateral NATO affair. And we were interested in the Franco-German relationship. And the list went on. You still had people like Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr who were pushing for more dialogue between the two Germanys.

Q: Schmidt?

BEECROFT: Helmut Schmidt was rather quiet. Schmidt was still in a state of shock and bitterness because he had seen his future greatness extending out as far as the eye could see. Now his tenure had been cut short by problems within his own party, so he was sulking, but there was no shortage of Germans visiting Washington. Karsten Voigt, Gert Weisskirchen, people like that who would come over all the time, touch bases on the Hill, give talks at CSIS and the like. We had a lot to do, but it was mainly political maintenance work. We kept things moving and helped keep the ship on course.

Q: You were there from when to when?

BEECROFT: I was there from '85 to '87, two years.

Q: Okay. Did you have a feeling that our relationship with Germany which is so based on the Cold War and the military, I won't say sour, just a shriveling or getting old. People had been dealing with do you lower the tailgate of trucks in Berlin six inches or ten inches, you know what I mean, and on and on and on.

BEECROFT: It was the latter. It was getting old. That's exactly what it was, and as I say we were in a maintenance phase. You had people coming up in the respective governments and militaries - not Reagan himself of course, or Weinberger - who were post-World War II. They didn't have that same sort of emotional tie to the relationship that their fathers had. This was just beginning to be a factor, but it wasn't considered a major problem because the Cold War was still going on. I remember though that great and somewhat novel debates were starting - discussions in the think tanks about the long-term consequences of having two states in one nation? You had the FRG and the GDR, and we had recognized both. People were still deluding themselves into thinking that the GDR was a viable state. It's amazing to think that three or four years later, we discovered that the GDR was an economic and ecological disaster. But at this point, in the mid '80s? No clue. No one had gone that far intellectually. Without knowing it, we were into a very late maintenance phase and it wasn't seen as all that interesting.

Q: I was wondering did you find, at one point we had a huge cadre of German hands. I think I mentioned before, my first post was Frankfurt and this was 1955. I think almost a third of the Foreign Service was serving in Germany during those years. Then all of a sudden it disappeared. I mean were you finding that the German hands was it harder to recruit them? Were they becoming too much a specific type? Was there anything that you might characterize about what was happening to the German hands at that time?

BEECROFT: They were getting old. There were a few younger ones. I think of people like Greg Thielmann, who since has also left the Foreign Service.

Q: I'm trying to get a hold of him right now. I've talked to him.

BEECROFT: A very impressive guy. I have a high regard for Greg. He had his share of turbulent moments later in his career. Greg was a young FSO at Embassy Bonn in the early '80s. But at the heart of the cadre were people like Walter Stoessel, Bill Woessner, Tom Tuch, Root Phelps, Dick Smyser, Marten van Heuven, Dick Barkley, Jack Seymour, Vlad Lehovich, Bill Shinn - a whole generation of brilliant people who really knew Germany and cared deeply about it. This was a wonderful group of people: the keepers of the German flame at the Department of State.

Q: In a way I would think this was part of the whole outlook towards Germany. I mean when you've been dealing with something for 40 years or close to 40 years you begin to think this is the way its going to be.

BEECROFT: Absolutely.

Q: I understand maybe I mentioned last time, I can't remember, but some people were saying that Arthur Burns was making noises about there might be something, I mean take a look, this isn't cast in concrete. Did you hear any of that?

BEECROFT: Yes. Burns was a very astute observer, and he intuited that change was coming. I think he sensed that the tectonic plates were shifting. This was a man who had lived through some pretty turbulent times. He was a political appointee, and seen as an economist more than a political observer. But Burns had made some comments about how nothing lasts forever and we'd better rethink how important Germany is to us. As long as we had the troops and the nukes and Germany was the front line of the Cold War, there was a feeling that no matter what the stresses and strains, the fundamental relationship couldn't and shouldn't be allowed to drift very far.

Q: Well, it was not something you could play with really.

BEECROFT: Right.

Q: When you were there, by the time you got out of the desk were you getting any feel about, you were talking about the Fulda Gap, about Soviet intentions. Had it pretty well become a matter that unless there's a flash point they're not going to attack us and we're not going to attack them?

BEECROFT: Yes. The Cold War itself by that time had become a matter of maintenance. The nuclear balance was still in place. No one wanted that to change, because no one really could anticipate or predict what the consequences of a shift might be. You may remember when Reagan and Gorbachev met in Reykjavik in 1985, there was this huge panic: my God, he's going to give away the store. The nightmare scenario was what might happen if the nuclear balance became unpredictable. We had all grown very comfortable with it. It may have been illogical, but the balance of terror had become something we knew how to maintain and live with. So the watchword was: don't rock the boat.

Q: Going back to sort of the German hand court, were you finding the FSOs who were maybe coming up the ladder in a way some of the people, I mean the really aspiring ones were maybe looking at the Near East or looking at developments in Asia or something. If in a way Germany and relationships there would call for somebody who likes to wear a pinstriped suit and have a very comfortable life as opposed to a challenging life because so much is done at the political level and all that.

BEECROFT: I didn't find that. As late as the late '80's, there was a widespread view in the Department that we were the keepers of the flame, and that the core interest of the United States in strategic stability was focused on the German account, with NATO as the underpinning. The unspoken goal was to keep Germany quiet. Churchill's old aphorism - the Germans are either at your throat at your feet was often quoted. We liked them at our feet. There were still a lot of people in Europe - I think of my wife's relatives in Norway, or friends in the Netherlands, or the French - who basically still were not sure that the Germans had truly accommodated themselves to being part of Europe and no more than that. That's why, even after France left the integrated military structure in 1966, they didn't remove their troops from Germany. There may still be some French troops there today; I don't know. In any case, we didn't seem to have any problem getting very good young FSO's to come on to the German desk.

Q: What did you find as you were pointing out? There were a lot of other players in the game? There's the Pentagon, there's the Treasury, there's the House, there's the Senate, there's the White House, then the media.

BEECROFT: The Intel community.

Q: The Intel community. Let's talk about some of these. How did you find the relationship at that point?

BEECROFT: Well, there was such a depth of German expertise scattered throughout the government that wherever you went, whomever you talked to, you would find yourself talking to somebody who had probably spent time in Germany, who may have spoken some German, or who at least had spent time in Brussels or somewhere else in Europe. So Germany was a prime account. Obviously, from an intelligence point of view, Germany was enormously important because we had so many listening posts there. All that is history now. On the military side, virtually everybody had spent time in Germany. Of course, by that time they'd all been to Vietnam, too, but they wanted to come back to Germany because there was a widespread feeling in the military, even during the Vietnam War, that the real show was Germany. Vietnam was where the bullets were flying, but there were a lot of people in the military, and certainly at the State Department, who thought Vietnam was the wrong war at the wrong place at the wrong time, because the real fulcrum was Germany. Wherever you went in Washington, you found people who knew these accounts, and those were the people you dealt with.

Q: Did you find any particular group, I'm thinking of our relationships with Israel and you've got the AIPAC and I mean here is a group that is a very strong advocate.

BEECROFT: Good point.

Q: Was there any equivalent to that?

BEECROFT: There was AIPAC.

Q: What?

BEECROFT: Well, there was AIPAC. AIPAC was in touch with us regularly.

Q: For what?

BEECROFT: Because it was Germany. ALPAC needed to be able to say, and wanted to be able to say "We remember what happened not that many years ago. We are continuing to seek and receive reassurances from Washington that the United States will keep Germany in its place" or words to that effect. We also got funny little phone calls from places you'd never expect. I got a phone call one day from a guy who was the head of some airplane combat airplane fanciers' club in Ohio. There were, and probably still are lots of them, many are retired Air Force officers and enlisted men. He told me he knew that many the U.S. air bases in Germany, like Ramstein for example, and Rhein-Main in Frankfurt were old Luftwaffe bases. On that count, he was right. Then he said he had absolutely authoritative information that there were secret bunkers left on these bases that held one-of-a-kind planes like the Arado 234, the world's first operational jet bomber, two-engine, a beautiful plane. Only a few ever went operational. The Germans didn't have enough jet fuel and they were deployed much too late in the war, even later than the Messerschmitt 262, the world's first operational jet fighter. There are none left, at least none that we know of. He said he knew of one. Another one was the, the Heinkel 219, which was a push-pull fighter with propellers at each end. He was sure there was one of those around. So we would contact Embassy Bonn and ask the defense attaché^{1/2} and he would call the commander of Ramstein, who would tell him where he could stuff it. So you had comic relief once in a while, and when you're dealing with German affairs, a little comic relief is always a good thing.

Q: They're quite serious.

BEECROFT: Germans, yes, right. I'm just going to get a soda, would you like a soda?

Q: Yes. Were there any, God I was almost going to say the German-American Bund, but that dates me. Were there German-American friendship societies that played any particular role?

BEECROFT: No.

Q: Because you've got this German community in Middle America and all that.

BEECROFT: No, I can't remember anything like that. Again, there were so many relationships. They were so deep and so broad; they didn't need us for that. Once in a while, you'd get the CSU involved in Sudeten refugee issues, but those were things that were usually handled by the Embassy and they didn't need to come to us. Of course those issues have lingered into the post-Cold War era.

Q: How did you find the German Embassy? How did it operate and how effective was it?

BEECROFT: Superb. The Germans at the Embassy really knew their stuff. Still do. My experience has been that overall, the German Foreign Service is not all that strong. By the way, if you go back to the pre-World War I and pre-World War II periods, the Foreign Office was sidelined. Part of the reason, and we used to talk about this a lot, is that to be a German diplomat you have to be a lawyer. It's a requirement. They take a very legalistic, somewhat ponderous view of what diplomacy is all about, lots of emphasis on details and not enough on the big picture.

Q: There are a number of other Foreign Services that have this. As a practical Foreign Service Officer dealing actually in legal matters is often working as a consul. I found that law is probably more of a minus than a plus.

BEECROFT: Oh, I agree. The Germans sent the best of the best here. Their current Ambassador, Wolfgang Ischinger, was a first secretary when I was OIC on the Desk. He was a superb and subtle political officer. Just as we had our German hands, they had their American hands, who kept coming back and were easy to deal with. We were very comfortable with each other by that time. If there was a high-level visitor, Helmut Kohl or Johannes Rau, you worked with your Embassy counterparts. I do remember one time, probably 1987, when Willy Brandt came. He was sort of the paterfamilias of the SPD at that point. He had no official government role, but he paid a call on the vice president of the United States, George Herbert Walker Bush. I accompanied Brandt to the Oval Office. We had done very detailed talking points for Bush.

Q: I understand he really took a brief extremely well.

BEECROFT: Bush was very impressive, but once he'd deployed his talking points, he started asking about the Greens, and specifically about Petra Kelly. This surprised us; we knew nothing about his interest in her. Of course Brandt didn't want to talk about the Greens. He wanted to talk about the SPD, and about Willy Brandt and his place in history. Of course there was nothing we could do. Bush wanted to talk about the youngsters. This was not something Brandt was interested in. He was interested in number one, Willy Brandt, and number two, the Social Democratic Party.

Q: How did Helmut Kohl and Ronald Reagan get along? They strike me as two back slappers, big men, good stories to each other. Did it work or not? How was the chemistry there?

BEECROFT: It worked in the Reagan-to-Kohl direction than vice versa. You're right, they were both very much people persons, loved the rough and tumble of politics and were very good at connecting with the common man, but Kohl of course spoke no known language, including German. He spoke Rhenish. I think Reagan needed somebody who spoke his language, literally and figuratively, to really connect. I never saw the two of them together, as I did with Brandt and Bush '41. They kept a cordial enough relationship, but again, even at their level it was more of a relationship of maintenance. They didn't have to work too hard at it.

Q: Well, did you find that as a desk officer that there was a certain amount of artillery fire is the wrong term, but communications above your head, you know, I mean secretaries of treasury are called ministers of finance and all this. I mean if you say it the relationship had gone on so long that I would think that you would find yourself way down and clearances and everything else were no longer necessary.

BEECROFT: Absolutely right. There was such a comfortable back-and-forth at so many levels that sometimes we would hear about things way after the fact, if at all. This was most awkward when the Embassy found itself in the same position - and that did happen.

Q: I'm sure.

BEECROFT: If Rick Burt found out, for example, that the Secretary of the Treasury had been in touch with his opposite number and hadn't bothered to let the Ambassador know, then guess who heard about it first and usually in words of one syllable.

Q: Speaking of Rick Burt, I've heard it said that Burt came and sort of stripped away the German hands in Bonn and kind of started over again either deliberately or inadvertently so that you didn't have quite as strong an embassy. Did you get a feel for that?

BEECROFT: Yes, there was some of that. He came in with the kind of agenda that you sometimes find among political appointees - a certain, let's say, skepticism about the motives and goals and objectives of the Foreign Service. I think that mellowed over time, but there was some real friction at the outset, including some cartoons that circulated in the Embassy that were pretty ugly.

Q: Were there any in the two years you were there, two plus years, were there any issues that sort of engaged you?

BEECROFT: Frankly, and maybe if I looked at my files I'd recall something, but nothing like the deployment of Pershing -2s that had so engaged us in the very beginning of the decade. As I say, this was the end of an era, not the beginning.

Q: Where stood the arms in Germany at that point when you got there?

BEECROFT: Well, we still had hundreds of thousands of Americans in Germany. The Pershing 2-s had been deployed. We never thought of them as something one might actually use, but there they were and the SS-20s were deployed in the GDR, so you had nuclear-tipped warheads with a warning time of about three minutes, which wasn't particularly comforting. I'm sorry, the question again?

Q: Well, the question was were there any sort of major issues that you had to deal with?

BEECROFT: No, no really cosmic issues. This is 1985 to 1987. Reagan had just been reelected. The focus was very much on Moscow and the future of the Soviet Union. Reagan was bound and determined, with Maggie Thatcher's support, to use Gorbachev to change the paradigm. No one expected it to happen as dramatically and quickly as it did.

Q: You as a German hand and other German hands had obviously been looking over the fence for years at the Soviets. What were you getting personally and others around you the reading on Gorbachev because I understand for a long time it was mixed. I mean was this guy for real or is this a cover plot?

BEECROFT: We didn't get a lot of that, but I think there was doubt, in Bonn as well as in Washington, that he could deliver. First of all, was he a true believing communist or a revisionist? There was a lot of debate about that. Second, assuming he was a true believing communist, could he deliver, and if he was a revisionist, what will happen to him? Now, as it turned out, at least up until say '89 or '90, there was no question that he was a true believer. He was trying to fix the system without renouncing Marxism. The Germans love this kind of theological debate and it was going on in spades. Actually, the ones who were really nervous were the East Germans because they saw it as nothing but trouble.

Q: Which it was.

BEECROFT: They were right.

Q: What about East Germany at that time?

BEECROFT: Whenever I went to Berlin which I did frequently I would go over to East Berlin and talk with our Embassy there. Dick Barkley was the Ambassador, and I had worked for him in Bonn. Outwardly, East Germany seemed to be the strongest pillar of the Warsaw Pact, along with Russia itself. Honecker was still very much in the saddle, and nobody - saw the demise of the GDR as imminent.

Q: Was anybody questioning the fact that East Germany is considered the 10th largest power or economic power or whatever it was?

BEECROFT: No, it was one of these clichés that had basically become self-confirming. The 10th largest economic power, I can remember using this stuff myself. The 10th largest economic power in a country the size of Ohio. We all or at least I don't know of anybody who really seriously challenged it.

Q: Did you find, I mean I realize there weren't any great issues, but on the desk did you find the product of the CIA interesting, useful or not?

BEECROFT: Much of it was useful, but it didn't challenge the conventional wisdom in any way where Germany was concerned. It was more reporting on personalities or conversations, things of that kind. We were all very comfortable in our ruts, including the CIA.

Q: How about was there a sort of a general feeling that the German government, West German government had a sizable number of East German agents in it?

BEECROFT: Yes, there were scandals having to do with Willy Brandt's secretary, Guenter Guillaume, and then Helmut Kohl's secretary. This kind of thing would kick up some dust for a while, but it wasn't seen as the sky falling. The Agency loved scandals. These did imply that a lot of what we thought were secrets were not.

Q: I have to say when you think about all the great tales about spies and what they did and the secrets and all that, its very, when you think about the results of all the efforts on both sides, very unimpressive.

BEECROFT: That's right.

Q: You know there was a game that was played and took immense amounts of money and skill and lots of fun, but actually what did it amount to?

BEECROFT: Well, that's right. I mean sometimes it can make a difference. I guess the classic example is the Ultra secret. We were reading the Nazis' mail from 1940 on. In the 1980's, there were, to my knowledge, no any huge breakthroughs that enabled us to deflect the course of history like that.

Q: Did you get any feel while you were there about the back and forth of Americans, particularly Americans going to Germany because the Germans coming to America because I sense now that Germany I think I may have mentioned this before had become sort of off to one corner. It's not a place. If you're going to go to Europe, you'd go to England, France, Italy or Spain.

BEECROFT: No, sad to say.

Q: I know, but it's not, in a way this lessens the ties. Was this a matter of concern?

BEECROFT: Not then. People would take boat cruises on the Rhine or go up to Garmisch or someplace like that, but I think Americans today would be as likely or more likely to go to Poland than to Germany. I would. I've never been to Poland. Along with Estonia, it's the only country in Europe I haven't been to.

Q: Yes.

BEECROFT: The ties were considered to be so natural that no one really thought much about them. That's changed.

Q: Then '87, whither?

BEECROFT: Right here. I was a student at the National War College, '87 to '88.

Q: How did you find your year there? What did you get from it?

BEECROFT: I got a lot from it, especially in terms of strategic thinking. The whole concept, which had never dawned on me at my grunt level in the military, the distinction between strategic and tactical thinking and planning with a clearly elaborated goal in mind, helped me a lot. It also helped a lot to get to know our military counterparts. I had worn the uniform, been a pol/mil officer, served at SHAPE and so forth, but it was good to interact with people our age who were eminently promotable, and with whom in some cases there would be future professional encounters. From then on, I bumped into NWC colleagues along the way, many of them wearing stars. I thought it was a great cultural experience, in addition to learning a lot here. What also saddened me then, and still does, is that the State Department is much less - how to put it? - committed to mid-career education as part of its career development pattern. This is a real mistake, and now that we have done away with the Senior Seminar, it's more glaring than ever. If people in the military don't punch these tickets, they're not going to make it. For us at State, mid-career education is considered a kind of a sidetrack, although I see something of a change in attitude under Secretary Powell on that - with the unfortunate exception of the cancellation the Senior Seminar. I gather they're looking at the National War College as an alternative to the Senior Seminar.

Q: Well, I mean it's the only one in town.

BEECROFT: That's right, and we do put resources into it.

Q: I'm a graduate of the senior seminar and unfortunately the military didn't seem to, it obviously was not very high on their priorities so that it was handy, but.

BEECROFT: The NWC was a great year. I enjoyed it a lot and learned a lot, and did some running and lifted weights and basically felt like I'd cleared my head in mid-career.

Q: Was there any when you were here in '80?

BEECROFT: '87 to '88.

Q: '87 to '88 period, was there any sort of leitmotiv or something that was going through there. You know there'd been times when Vietnam was or the Fulda Gap or something, was there anything that the military was kind of looking at?

BEECROFT: For the U.S. military, one was the repercussions of the 1983 disaster in Beirut. There was a lot of soul-searching about the lessons learned from that.

Q: You might explain what the disaster in Beirut was.

BEECROFT: This was when about 300 U.S. Marines were killed in a barracks in Beirut. It was after the U.S. had gone into Lebanon on what was basically a peacekeeping mission that had morphed into a peacemaking mission in which we were seen as having taken sides.

Q: There was no particular.

BEECROFT: No one knew what our troops were there for, or what the mission was. Over time, the local attitude hardened toward them. There was a truck bomb. This truck had driven into the base and exploded. That got a lot of attention at NWC. The second thing was the attack on Qadhafi's tent. Remember? The Air Force bombed him in retaliation for the bombing of a Berlin night club popular with U.S. troops. Actually, that's something I forgot. One of the things that happened on my watch was the bombing of the Berlin nightclub in 1986. We had strong evidence that Qadhafi was behind it, so our response was to try and take him out from the air. He had this practice of going out and staying in a tent. Killed one of his children, a daughter. That was tragic, and led in turn to Lockerbie. So, we had Lockerbie, that was in '89. The Qadhafi raid was another thing that the War College students were looking at. A third thing was a concept - jointness. What had come out in spades in Vietnam was that the various services didn't talk to each other very well. There was a lot of interservice rivalry. The question was not who could do a particular operation best. It was how everybody could get a piece of the action. Now, virtually overnight, everything had to be joint. This was what Congress had mandated in the Goldwater-Nichols Act. The watchword for jointness, then and now, is purple, because if you mix all the colors of the uniforms together you get purple. I've been arguing here at the War College that you need to add some pinstripes to the purple, because it's now dawning on people that international relations involves more than just the military. There has to be jointness beyond the uniform services to include the State Department, the intelligence community - we have to operate as a unit. This is not something that was appreciated very much in '88.

Q: Was there much talk about say the keeping the troops too long in Beirut that was the beginning of sort of the I guess it's called the Powell Doctrine or Weinberger Doctrine. You've got to have an end strategy and all that.

BEECROFT: Absolutely. Weinberger had series of rules that were being widely quoted at the time about public support, congressional support, appropriate level of use of force, which as you say was later refined into the Powell Doctrine. Add to that the idea of jointness, purple, which was the drum that was beaten all year - the right mix of services for each mission. No one at that point could have imagined where this was going to take us over the next 15 years or so. What I see here today is that jointness, which at that time was a word, has now become a fact. The services they work much more cooperatively, even the Navy, which is always the most particular.

Q: There's the right way, the wrong way and the navy way.

BEECROFT: The Navy has its own culture even now, but this culture is much less parochial than it was in '88.

Q: Was the example of Grenada something that was, I mean you know, you had supposedly the marines ran it and having to call from the payphone over to North Carolina to the base there in order to talk to the airborne troops or something.

BEECROFT: Yes, I remember hearing the stories about the pay phone. One soldier had gone into a service station and bought a map of Granada because they didn't have maps. Grenada was seen as a kind of bizarre sideshow and certainly not something they wanted to do again.

Q: Did you sense was there a suspicion of the State Department types, you got us into this damn Vietnam War you know and all that?

BEECROFT: No.

Q: Because when I was Vietnam I picked up some of this.

BEECROFT: No. I think we were past that kind of finger-pointing by the late '80s. In fact, we're now in our Vietnam segment of courses here at the War College, and there is not very much focus on the State Department at all. The focus is on Robert McNamara and William Westmoreland and Lyndon Johnson, but Dean Rusk has not been mentioned a whole lot.

Q: '88.

BEECROFT: Yes?

Q: Whither?

BEECROFT: Off to Ouagadougou.

Q: Oh boy.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: I always use Ouagadougou as the sort of the never never land. It's a great name to use, but anyway Ouagadougou as what?

BEECROFT: Ouagadougou. Well. When I finished my year at the National War College in June '88, first of all I wanted to go overseas again, and second, I wanted to be a DCM. I'd never been a DCM. We've all heard the cliché about a 50% failure rate for DCMs. I wanted to test myself - let's see if I can do this. So, I called a friend from Egypt days, Frances Cook. She was the personnel and assignments DAS in AF. I had already looked at the open assignments list of DCMships, and frankly there was very little that fit with my background. So I figured okay, let's shoot for something really different. And there on the list was Ouagadougou.

Q: Ouagadougou being the capital of what?

BEECROFT: Burkina Faso, formerly Upper Volta. Burkina Faso means "land of the upright men," renamed by president, Thomas Sankara, who had been assassinated by his successor, Blaise Compaoré. I called Frances and I said I'm interested in going to Ouagadougou as DCM. After she stopped laughing she said, I'll get back to you. Lo and behold, I got it. It was a total shot in the dark.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

BEECROFT: There were two during my time there. The first was David Shinn. He had been there for a year by the time I got there. Later he became Ambassador to Ethiopia. He and his wife Judy were from Yakima, Washington - old Africa hands. My second Ambassador there, during my third year there, was Ed Brynn, a wonderful man. We're still very good friends. He's now retired from State and teaching at UNC Charlotte.

Q: Yes, I've interviewed Ed.

BEECROFT: A great guy, brilliant. In any case, before we went out to post, my wife Mette and I talked with the previous Ambassador, Leonard "Nard" Neher and his wife. They gave us valuable insights into what made the place tick, what my priorities might be, and so forth. For us, Ouaga was a total change. It was also francophone. I wanted to go to a place where I knew the language. We flew via Paris, and transferred to UTA French African airlines, and lo and behold, there we were in Ouagadougou. I remember to this day what Mrs. Neher said: "When you go to Ouagadougou you cry twice, once when you arrive and once when you leave, but for different reasons." And she was right. When you arrive, you see this gaggle of modest buildings and mud huts on a low, flat plain, with a couple of artificial lakes in the distance and the horizon stretching away across the Sahel to the Sahara, and you say, my God, what is there to do here for three years? And before very long, you realize that you don't want to leave. We had a great time.

Q: You were there from '88 to '91?

BEECROFT: '91. Yes.

Q: What had you been told or what were as you went out, what were our interests in Ouagadougou?

BEECROFT: Our major interest in Burkina Faso had to do with Muammar Qadhafi and his designs on West Africa. There was a Charles Taylor angle to that to Taylor had spent time in Libya, and had also lived a lot of his life in the United States, had been jailed in Massachusetts, had operated an office in South Orange, New Jersey, and had fingers in all kinds of pies.

Q: You might explain who Charles Taylor is.

BEECROFT: Charles Taylor is a vile human being who became president of Liberia and proceeded to get involved in the diamond trade in Sierra Leone. He supported the rebels in Sierra Leone, the ones who chopped children's hands off. He is one of the world's great crooks, a man who drained what little resource base the country of Liberia had and made its peoples' lives worse than it had been to start with. For a lot of that time we turned a blind eye. When I arrived in Ouaga, Charles Taylor was spending a lot of time in Ghana with - what was his name? Samuel Doe?

Q: No, Doe was.

BEECROFT: Was it a sergeant?

Q: He was the air force officer.

BEECROFT: Got it. Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings.

Anyway, Taylor was commuting between Accra and Ouagadougou. This was in '89-'90. Blaise Compaoré^{1/2}, the president of Burkina Faso, then and now, used to put him up in a government guest house. Of course we kept a close eye on this, sometimes with the help of the French Embassy. I had a good relationship with the French Embassy, which helped a lot. Our residence was right under the glide path to Ouagadougou International Airport. Every Friday this big white Ilyushin transport plane from Libya would come right over our house and touch down at Ouagadougou Airport. It was the only airstrip in the country big enough to handle such planes. I would send one of our people from the Embassy out to check it out. He had a Great Dane. It turned out that Africans are very skittish about large dogs. I would simply call him up and say "Go walk the dog," and he would. They would always offload a lot of crates marked "medicine." My colleague would come back and say, "Well, the medicine this week consists of 50 crates of Kalashnikovs, 25 mortars, ten cartons of hand grenades..." and all of this stuff would transit Burkina Faso and Northern Côte d'Ivoire, and then onward into Liberia. And this was all Charles Taylor's doing, with Qadhafi's support. This was a case where the War College really helped. If you look at a map of Africa, and draw a line southwest from Libya across the Sahara to the coast at Sierra Leone, it goes right through Burkina Faso to northern Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. And you say to yourself, Qadhafi has a strategy here. He is trying to divide West Africa. That's exactly what he was trying to do - draw a diagonal line down to the coast and, eventually, simply convert the whole area with his Little Green Book. It was his strategy so that was interesting. We got nothing but pious denials from Compaora Catholic, by the way that he was helping in any way.

I'd been there two or three weeks, I can't remember exactly, and it was the second anniversary of the bombing of Qadhafi's tent. Of course the rhetoric out of Tripoli was horrendous, but the only country in the world that had worse things to say about the United States was Burkina Faso. It was a Friday, and once the Burkinabè statement hit Washington, I got a phone call. State had decided to recall the Ambassador Shinn. I called the ambassador and said, "David, they want you to leave right away." The following day, Saturday, he and Judy left. Nothing happened over the weekend; nothing ever happens in Burkina over the weekend. Monday morning, the phone rings, summoning the Ambassador to the Foreign Ministry. Obviously, they've decided to keep the anti-American drum beat going. Qadhafi must have been giving them a lot of goodies. I said, very innocently, "Oh, he's not here." "Where is he?" "Oh, he's left." "Well, then you come." So the newly minted Chargé d'Affaires goes down to the Foreign Ministry a matter of a few blocks- with no instructions. It was still the middle of the night in Washington. If I recall correctly, I saw the Deputy Foreign Minister. He launches into his prepared tirade about America's aggression in Libya in 1986. After a couple of minutes, I put up my hand and said "Excuse me, I'd like to make a brief statement, and then I will leave. Ambassador Shinn has left Burkina Faso. It's entirely up to you if you want an American ambassador or not; it doesn't matter to us one way or the other. Please do not think that he has gone because you matter to us. The opposite is the case. We will be watching what you say in the coming days, and we'll draw our own conclusions. Au revoir, monsieur." And I left. All this was without instructions, except for my impressions of Washington's anger over the phone.

Q: What happened?

BEECROFT: I figured, well, looks like my tour here will be very short. The next day in the local state-run press: conciliatory language. "We must get past the events of 1986 and look to a better relationship between Libya and the United States" - as if anyone cared what Burkina Faso thought about the bilateral relationship between Washington and Tripoli - and that was the end of it. Two weeks later the Ambassador returned. That was a baptism of fire I'll never forget.

Q: Did we have intelligence people looking at what Qadhafi was doing there or did we take care of it on our own or how did we do it?

BEECROFT: We had a presence. You'll understand that I don't want to go into detail. We that kept an eye on Qadhafi, and on the connections he was trying to develop. At that time, he was still a true believer in his own cause and trying to play strategic games in his immediate neighborhood. Burkina Faso was a useful target of opportunity. Blaise Compaoré saw himself as a young revolutionary and something of a soul brother even though he's Catholic, so yes, we watched it.

Q: Where did this stand, I mean, when were the Kyoto wars going on in Chad and all that?

BEECROFT: Chad was awfully far away from Burkina Faso. One of the real learning experiences for me, who had never been south of the Sahara, was how bloody big Africa is. Chad is a long way off. West Africa basically took care of West Africa. West Africa stops where Cameroon starts. We had an old Peugeot 505, and we visited by road every country surrounding Burkina Faso - Niger, Mali, Bîç ½nin, Togo, Cîç ½te d'Ivoire, Ghana. It's a big and very beautiful area when you get the feel for it. We loved going out to villages. We got to know one chief in particular, the leader of a group of villages, some 9,000 people, north of Ouaga. This guy had actually been a deputy in the French national assembly before independence. The village didn't even have electricity. He had his own gas lamps, and he had a wonderful library. You could go out to his village for a weekend there were no lights at night except the ones in his house. The stars were so close you could touch them. Here was this very erudite man, who spoke perfect French and had lived through the end of the colonial era. Now he was a very big fish in a quite small pond. It was great.

Q: What else would the embassy be doing? I mean, you know.

BEECROFT: Two things - AID and support for human rights. We no longer had a Peace Corps mission in Ouaga. It had been pulled out in response to President Compaorîç ½'s murder of his predecessor, Thomas Sankara, who was something of a charismatic figure. Sankara used to drive around town in his own Toyota. The AID mission stayed on. It was a small account. It focused on peoples' lives, not building roads or hotels in Ouaga or anything like that. They did some very interesting things. Burkina Faso is mostly flatland and very low volcanic hills, red laterite - ungrateful, rocky terrain. What rain there was would tend to run down the hills and down the creeks without ever being absorbed into the ground, because the ground wasn't very porous. So, one of our AID people had come up with a very simple system using lengths of garden hose. You fill them with water and you up a hill and you'd actually make a series of necklaces down the hill. When the water level was the same at both ends of the hose, you knew that you had the fall line of the hill. You know where the rainwater is going to go when it comes down the hill. What the French and others had tried to do was build basins, but this didn't work very well because they didn't always know where the water was going to go. We didn't bother with the basins. The locals thought this was wonderful because you didn't need the basins. All you did was put the hoses on the hillside and leave them there. Then when the rains came, the hoses would slow it down so that it would have a chance to be absorbed into the ground and it would raise the water table, and it worked. This was replicated all over the region. AID was doing simple, practical things that would improve crops. They also were very much into eradicating river blindness.

Q: There's this, I guess there's a cycle in the Sahel about when you have terrible drought and all that and we got very much involved in relief efforts and all that.

BEECROFT: Correct.

Q: Where was the cycle?

BEECROFT: In West Africa the rainy season starts at the end of May and ends in early September. If it doesn't rain then, it won't rain at all until the following year. In the three years that I was there, the rains were good. It's funny - even after all these years, I still check the rainy cycle in West Africa. You can do it online now. If the reservoirs are low by say mid-Spring or gone, you know you've got a problem, but again that's why this hose system was so practical. We worked a lot with NGOs on river blindness - bilharzia. Catholic Relief Services was there, Save the Children was there. It's caused by a kind of a worm or a parasite that thrives in the few low-lying river valleys.

Q: Is it like _____?

BEECROFT: Yes, that's right. Basically river blindness was on the way to being eradicated, largely through the efforts of USAID, and that was good news.

Q: What would say a political officer do there?

BEECROFT: We had one political officer, Stuart Jones. He actually was here last year on the War College faculty. He and I both did political work. As DCM, I did the labor reporting because the labor unions were actually quite active on the French model, CGT. You follow human rights, domestic political affairs, relations with neighboring West African states, relations with the various religious groups, to some extent ethnic relations, although in Burkina, which was largely Mossi, that was less of a problem than it would be in, say, Côte d'Ivoire. There was enough to keep a political officer busy.

Q: What were we doing on the human rights line?

BEECROFT: Well, you remember that human rights was something that Jimmy Carter had started as a major U.S. foreign policy priority. He created the Bureau of Human Rights. Everybody thought that when Reagan came in that, that would be the end of that, but Reagan had seen the value of human rights as another stick to beat the Soviets with, so he expanded our human rights activities. I was in Ouaga during the late Reagan/early Bush '41 era, and we got instructions from the Department to renew our focus on human rights. This was at a time, at the end of the Cold War, when there were a few brave souls out there in Burkina Faso, local people, who founded a human rights NGO. It was called the Mouvement Burkinabè pour les Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples. It was headed by a judge. His name was Alidou Ouïdraogo. In Burkina, Ouïdraogo is like Smith. Jones and I got to know him very well. This was one very smart man. I think he had political ambitions. Politically, he was quite close to being a communist, but he truly believed in human rights, that human rights were not dependent on poverty levels, and that human rights were in fact a basis for developing prosperity and democracy. Of course he was hounded and harassed by government authorities. So we got him a leader grant, an IVP trip, and sent him to the U.S. That did wonders. It was in effect a message from the United States, don't put this guy in jail, don't touch him, give him some space. This was also a time when there was real movement in South Africa. Mandela was gaining influence and power. These things served as a warning signal to the local powers to allow for a bit of latitude. Like almost everybody in Burkina Faso, Alidou Ouïdraogo had systemic malaria. Once in a while he would get a fever and just ride it out. Well, this happened to him in Portland, Oregon, while he was on his IVP tour. He immediately became a local celebrity, because no one at the local hospital had ever seen a case of malaria! So he explained I have malaria, I need the following medicines. It was on the television news program "visiting African dignitary has malaria." As soon as people were reassured that it wasn't contagious, it added to his charm. When he returned to Ouaga, we funded an office for his human rights movement, with typewriters and tables and stuff. It cost a pittance, but it gave him a place to hang his sign. I got a phone call one day from my French Embassy counterpart, with whom I generally got along well. We went out and had lunch. He said, "I'm speaking to you as a friend, but this is also French policy. We wish you wouldn't spend so much time on human rights." I said, "Well, what do you mean?" He said, and these were his very words, "This is our deep South. We don't want any trouble down here." I said, "Well, thank you very much." We didn't throttle back.

Q: Sounds familiar.

BEECROFT: Yes. It was something like out of a Graham Greene novel. There we were in the Hï½tel Central dining room - the owner of which was from Monte Carlo and he was on the run, I think it was a murder charge. The French had the most amazing collection of local colonial residents. This guy actually ran one of the better restaurants in town. We're sitting there having, of all things, spaghetti flambï½. Can you imagine? Now, the best restaurant in town was called the l'Eau Vive, the living water. It was owned and operated by the local Catholic Diocese. You ate outside in this lovely garden, and there was a spotlit statue of the Virgin Mary with water gushing from beneath her feet. It was good French cuisine. The waitresses were reformed prostitutes, many from Vietnam. At 9:30 pm, all eating and serving stopped and they would distribute prayer sheets and you'd sing hymns for 10 minutes. This was nothing like Bonn or Cairo.

Q: Tell me a bit about the government there.

BEECROFT: Interesting group. I mentioned it was headed by Blaise Compaorï½, the former Minister of Justice, who had killed his best friend Thomas Sankara and taken his chair in October 198nine months before I got there. When I say "taken his chair," this is a tradition in the Mossi culture that the person who has the stool of authority is in charge, no matter how he gets it. Compaorï½, by the way, still has the stool. Compaorï½ had been a military officer, a commando, and became Minister of Justice under Sankara. He surrounded himself with an interesting mix of military types and French-trained technocrats. He was no fool, is no fool. That's why he's still in power. He was careful to maintain good relations with the various tribal groups. As I noted, the Mossi people predominate, so it wasn't a big problem as it is in so many African states, but there is another group called the Bobo, down in the southwest corner of Burkina, who were quite strong and sometimes quite headstrong. Compaorï½ made sure they were well represented and, on a modest scale, stayed on good terms with France, which mattered a lot. The French influence could not be overstated. France was still the magnet; it was what you measured your success against.

Every other year, now as then, they have a festival called FESPACO, which is the West African film festival. It's a big deal. Burkina Faso makes good movies. They made one called Yaaba which was widely praised. I still have it on tape. Yaaba means grandmother. It was about life in a village. In Burkina Faso, nobody was starving. Between subsistence agriculture, remittances and international aid, people got by. This was before AIDS had worked its way up to Burkina Faso. It had reached the coast, but not the interior. There were a lot of Burkinabï½ working down on the coast, especially in Cï½te d'Ivoire. Remittances were very important to family viability. The political, social and economic collapse of Cï½te d'Ivoire has created huge problems for Burkina Faso. But no one starves in Burkina Faso. They may not be living luxurious lives, but people got by.

Q: Human rights. What were the problems when you were there?

BEECROFT: Human rights. Well, the basic problem was the absence of the rule of the law. The rule of law was what the government said it was. There were, as I mentioned, judges who had been trained according to the French model. But the courts were very hit or miss, and undoubtedly took guidance from the government. There was a parliament, but it was not serioutypical rubber-stamp approach. Students had to be very careful about what they said or did or they would find that their scholarships had been revoked. People could be put in jail with no charges levied and simply disappear.

Q: The French. I mean they were obviously pretty well calling the shots, but how were the relations with the French? The French have always been at least maybe not at a certain point they were terribly suspicious of what we were up to. Are we going to supplant them which would place us far from being our policy, but still.

BEECROFT: Just by our weight.

Q: Yes. What was the French American relationship?

BEECROFT: It was excellent. Again, since I spoke French and knew the Ambassador and the DCM, I got invited to a lot of events at the French Embassy. But the French have this thing about "Anglo-Saxons." What the French thought they saw, amazingly enough, was that the Americans, or maybe the British with American support, had a strategic plan to supplant the French in West Africa politically and economically and make English the dominant language in the region. The French just aren't happy unless see a plot at work. They saw a strategic plan to minimize the French influence in West Africa, whereas the reality was we were perfectly happy to have them be the top dog in West Africa. We had enough fish to fry then, and God knows we do now.

Q: Yes.

BEECROFT: But they just love this stuff.

Q: What about social life with the people there?

BEECROFT: The U.S. Embassy, including USAID, had a staff of about 30 people. As DCM, you spend a lot of your time cheerleading. Morale can be a problem. We once had a staff meeting whose only theme was "Why are we here?" and that was good. We talked about the various reasons why the United States actually puts people on the ground in places like Burkina Faso, unlike some other countries that have roving, regional ambassadors. The Finns for example: their ambassador was stationed in Helsinki and once a year he would do the rounds. Even the Brits had a couple of roving ambassadors. We do not, or at least didn't then, I don't know if we do now. The Embassy had a nice small club with clay tennis courts and a pool. There were tennis tournaments. The DCM's residence was very nice house, with a pool and a garden and a big patio, and we held square dances for the community every week. Pulled the loudspeakers out on the patio, people would come and square dance. Most of the year, the evening is the best time for outdoor events. The nights are beautiful and mild. It's actually chilly in the winter. We also had good relations with other embassies, including the Soviet Union, which at that point was in the process of collapsing. The Soviet Embassy had been huge. They had had over 100 people in Burkina Faso, and in the spring of 1991 most of them left. This really hit the "socialist" Burkinabè government hard. The Chinese were well represented too. I knew the Iranians at a time when we were hardly talking to them. Even the Libyans. You couldn't help but know everybody.

We had a small Marine Security Guard that was subsequently removed - no real need for an MSG. As I said, the living quarters were nice. The AID director had a house that was easily as nice as the Ambassador's residence.

Q: Which is often the case.

BEECROFT: Indeed. Our house had been the AID director's house, and then it was converted to the DCM's residence. It very nice. Of course, we had a generator, a big one. When the electric power failed and the generator kicked in, it sounded like the Hindenburg taking off.

Q: Well, then you left there in?

BEECROFT: '91.

Q: '92. We'll end at this point, but where did you go?

BEECROFT: I went to Brussels to be the number three at the U.S. Mission to NATO.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up then.

BEECROFT: Okay.

Q: Great.

Today is the 29th of October, 2004. Bob, could you talk a little bit about the U.S. Mission to NATO, how it was composed and how it fit into that whole Brussels diplomatic mess.

BEECROFT: Well, it didn't fit in with any great enthusiasm. NATO, especially at that time, considered itself the first among equals among the three U.S. missions in Brussels, because you have the Ambassador to NATO, the Ambassador to the European Union - or as it was then, the European Community - and the bilateral Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Belgians. From the point of view of protocol, the bilateral Ambassador has the lead. He or she is the one who holds the annual 4th of July reception. The reality is that there has been for some time now a tug of war for primacy between the Ambassador to the European Union and the Ambassador to NATO. I gather that over the past 10 years the center of gravity has moved more and more toward the EU.

Q: One would imagine this.

BEECROFT: Yes. But at this time, in 1991, in the aftermath of the fall of the Wall and with the Soviet Union teetering, all eyes were on NATO, not on downtown Brussels. It was a fascinating time to arrive there, especially coming from Ouagadougou and having missed the Wall coming down. It was somewhat frustrating to be in West Africa while those events took place, although I'm glad I did it. I got to Brussels in the late summer of '91, and first Gulf War was on everybody's mind. Ironically, the first Gulf War and our quick triumph there had an impact on a lot of things I've done since then, because the U.S. felt that we had done a service for the Alliance and for everybody else by defeating Saddam Hussein and restoring Kuwait. We looked to the Europeans to do things they weren't ready to do in the Balkans. But that's further down the line.

Anyway, this was the fall of '91, and there were amazing things happening. We were in the very first stages of developing of opening the Alliance to a dialogue with the Warsaw Pact, which was quickly becoming the former Warsaw Pact. You had these amazing experiences in the halls of NATO headquarters - seeing a Polish general walk by and doing a double-take and saying to yourself, what is that person doing here? This outreach initiative toward the former adversary was one that the U.S. was pushing very hard, against, I should add, serious French resistance, because the French saw the end of the Cold War as an opportunity to distance Europe from the United States. That was another thing about that period. There were three U.S. Ambassadors to NATO in three years.

Q: Who were they?

BEECROFT: The first was William Howard Taft, IV, who more recently has been the Legal Advisor in L in the Department, a very nice man, soft-spoken but smart and very subtle. His successor was Reggie Bartholomew, and the third was Robert Hunter. Three very different people. Taft was a high-powered lawyer and a Bush '41 political appointee. He worked very hard to try to establish a constructive personal relationship with his French counterpart, a man named Gabriel Robin, whose politics were hard right, way beyond Gaullism. Actually I gathered he'd been involved in quasi-fascist organizations like Action Française. Robin was no lover of the United States. It was interesting. He had written a book in the early '80s, criticizing Mitterrand for buckling under to the U.S. on Middle East policy. Mitterrand read the book, and responded by calling Robin and offering him the post of French Ambassador to NATO. Robin took the job, and his performance gave new meaning to the word sabotage. Taft worked hard to sort of build a personal relationship with Robin, who repeatedly rebuffed him. It was not pretty. There were many times in the North Atlantic Council when Robin was openly anti-American to a degree that embarrassed the rest of the Council.

Q: Could you explain on NATO. I mean you have this thing with NATO where France is in NATO, but not in NATO at that time. Could you explain?

BEECROFT: It's important to remember that France is a founding member of NATO and remains one of the leading financial contributors to the Alliance. There is nothing in the North Atlantic Treaty that says a word about an integrated military structure. France has been a strict instructionist on this point over the years. When de Gaulle pulled France out of the integrated military structure in 1966, he did no damage to its NATO membership in terms of the strict legal reality. You may recall that during the early '50s there was an initiative to build a European Defense Community which failed in the French national assembly - one of the few times the French National Assembly has ever stood up and growled. This was less than 10 years after the end of World War II, and the French weren't interested in seeing Germany rearmed. But the U.S. was. So we gave Germany the alternative it was looking for by creating or redefining the military side of NATO. SHAPSupreme Allied Powers Europe - SHAPE existed from the war, when it has been SHEASupreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force. SHAPE constituted the beginnings of the integrated military structure, always under an American commander. After the European Defense Community failed in 1954, the U.S. just kept on reinforcing the military wing of NATO. This allowed us to bring a rearmed Germany into an integrated military structure that would prevent any temptation on Germany's part to go it alone. So now we're talking about 30 years after that. The Cold War is clearly ending and the French are still looking for a way to loosen the U.S. domination of continental European affairs.

Q: Talking about when you first got there, how did you see any, I mean did you have a French counterpart and your British and German and other counterparts, how did you all work together?

BEECROFT: There was, and still was, a second-level forum under the North Atlantic Council (the NAC) - the DCMs, who meet as the SPC, the Senior Political Committee. The only exception the U.S. Mission, as usual. Instead of the DCM being on the SPC, it's the number three, which meant me. My job title was Polad or Political-Economic Advisor. So my counterpart on the French side was their DCM, Richard Duqu¹/₂, whose family was originally Spanish. He was an interesting guy who had actually trained to be an actor. And he was some actor! He could bluff with the best of them in the SPC. The purpose of the SPC is to clear away the underbrush for the NAC and focus decisions that the NAC would then address. We were good friends. He knew I knew the French culture and the language. And he knew the U.S. had even married a Cuban-American refugee. We got along fine on a personal basis, but we had some real tussles in the SPC. His successor was Gilles Andri¹/₂ani, the son of a very distinguished senior French diplomat. Gilles was, if anything, harder-line than Richard, but they were both reasonable enough if you kept in mind where they were coming from.

Q: What were the issues, I mean what sort of issues would come up on this French, American and how did the other members of the alliance play into this?

BEECROFT: The big issue at that time was the future of NATO in the post-Cold-War world. There were lots of think-pieces being written on whether NATO even had a future. If there's no Soviet threat, no Warsaw Pact, does NATO really have a reason to go on? There were a lot of people at the Quai d'Orsay in Paris who would have said no. In fact the French even tabled a proposal that the French at about this time proposing that the locus for European security be shifted from NATO to the CSCE, later OSCE. Now, I respect the OSCE. but for anybody who knows the OSCE this is funny, because the OSCE consists of 55 countries that operate on consensus, including Russia. Even the French delegation was embarrassed to put that idea forward, but they did. After it was laughed out of the room, we eventually settled back to focus on two things. The first was the U.S. proposal that eventually became the Partnership for Peace. This idea originated with SACEUR, General Shalikashvili. He was looking for a way to bring the military organizations of the former Warsaw Pact in from out of the cold, and make them part of the NATO integrated structure, or at least associate members.

I remember an informal meeting out at Truman Hall, the residence of the U.S. Ambassador or Permanent Representative to NATO, Will Taft, to brainstorm this idea. A few of us, including Taft and Shali, sat down and batted this idea around. How do we make it happen? It still seemed rather visionary, but coming from a four-star general, not a politician, it got our attention and it seemed very appealing. So, there was a lot of strategizing about how you go about it. Now, this was the fall of '91. A couple of things were happening at that point, although we didn't realize it at the time, that were going to have a real impact on NATO's future. The first was the gradual collapse of Yugoslavia. There was still a lot of euphoria in the air in the fall of '91, a feeling that the millennium had arrived early. Frances Fukuyama had published an article declaring that history was at an end, and there were those who were prepared to believe it. Even in the fall of '91, before the shooting started in earnest the following year in Yugoslavia, there were debates and discussions on whether NATO should be responding in some way, and if so how. It was at that point that Germany broke with the rest of the European Union and recognized Croatia, and this turned out to be a fatal decision.

Q: What was the analysis. I mean I've talked to other people about this. Some say it was Genscher who was the former minister as part of the FDP or something. What was your feeling and why?

BEECROFT: Certainly Genscher did not object, but I think it's a lot deeper than just Genscher. First of all Germany has always had equities in the Balkans. They keep a watchful eye on what's going on there. After all it was events in the Balkans in 1914 that sucked them into World War I. Also, a significant element of Germany is Catholic, so the CSU is especially attentive. The Croats have always made a lot of hay about the fact that they are Catholic and they are more western than the Serbs or Bosniaks which I do not believe. But it's a hardy politician indeed in Germany who is going to go against the Croats. So when the Croats began pressing for recognition by the states of the European Union, and the European Union said no, it's not time yet, the Germans just went ahead and did it anyway.

Q: I think also the Pope did, too.

BEECROFT: Yes, the Pope did, too.

Q: This was a one two punch and having been an old sort of hand, I mean to put the Pope who the Catholic Church was not a benevolent force.

BEECROFT: It never is. The Vatican follows its interests as it perceives them, like any other state.

Q: Well, and the Balkans, it was responsible for lots of massacres and all that against Orthodox and then the Germans for what they did. This was a one two punch for the Serbs.

BEECROFT: Absolutely. All of these things came into play. Genscher being an East German originally, he may also have thought recognizing Croatia would be an interesting way to thumb his nose at the Russians, who are pro-Serb. Who knows? Anyway they did it. There was a summit in Rome in November of 1991. Two subjects dominated the agenda. The establishment of the so-called NACC, North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which later became the EAPC, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, was approved. The French made a lot of noise, but at the end of the day they acquiesced. The second thing was concern about what was going on in the Balkans. In the background of all this was concern about Russia and how we would deal with the Warsaw Pact or the remnants of the Warsaw Pact. A month later, on December 21, the first meeting of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, the NACC took place as part of the semi-annual Ministerial in Brussels. Every June and every December, the ministerial meetings of both the NATO foreign ministers and defense ministers except France, which doesn't send its defense minister. That was a ministerial session I will never forget. It included the first meeting of the 44 NACC countries, including Russia. Almost all the heads of delegation were foreign ministers. It was a big gathering with lots of press coverage, in the large conference room in NATO. Interestingly, the Russian Foreign Minister wasn't there. Instead the Russians, the Soviets, sent their Ambassador to Brussels and NATO, Ambassador Afanassevsky, a very smart and nervous man - a chain smoker, he later became the Russian Ambassador to France. So it's around 6:00 in the evening and two sets of negotiations had going on all day - there were two communiqués for the first time. There was the customary communiqué of the NAC, for the NATO allies only, and then the first-ever communiqué of the NACC, which was the NATO allies plus all these former Warsaw Pact countries. Nobody knew how the communiqué for the NACC it was going to go, but it went very smoothly. The Warsaw Pact ministers were very happy to be there. The Soviets had only sent their ambassador, so they weren't getting much pushback from Moscow. So it's around 6:00 or 6:30 pm, very early, and James Baker was there for the United States and Will Taft, and the usual staff support fluttering around, including me. The NATO Secretary General, Manfred Wörner, was very much in charge. At that point he was still in good health, this was before cancer took him, and he's in the chair and very much in charge. He looks around and says, "Well, is everyone agreed?" There was a long silence in the room and everyone is quietly praying that we're not in for an all-nighter. So the Soviet Ambassador raises his hand, and everybody says, oh no. So Wörner says, "Well, Mr. Ambassador?" And Afanassevsky says, "Mr. Secretary General, I regret this, but I have a request to make." "What's that?" "Well, I have to request, on instructions from Moscow that all references to the Soviet Union be removed from the communiqué." There is, as you can imagine, a long silence. "What do you mean?" "Well, Mr. Secretary General, I have been informed by Moscow that the Soviet Union has ceased to exist." The room goes totally silent.

Q: Oh, yes.

BEECROFT: If I remember correctly, and I think I do, that Wigner, who was never at a loss for creative ideas, suggested that a footnote to that effect be inserted in the communiqué. Imagine: the Soviet Union reduced to a footnote! They eventually worked it out and people did get their dinners that night, but there we were, hearing from the mouth of the Soviet Ambassador that he was no longer the Soviet Ambassador, just the Russian ambassador. It reminds me of Norman Mailer's comment after, losing the mayoralty race in New York, that for 15 minutes he felt he had his hand on the rump of victory. Just amazing. It was one of those moments that you don't forget, but also, in hindsight, it sent a signal that history was not over. We were entering a new era, but weren't sure what it was going to look like and or even know what to call it. If you call it the post-Cold-War era, that's a negative what it isn't, not what it is. The issues we were dealing with began to change. The Balkans, for example. The relationship between NATO and the United Nations. How you develop the Partnership for Peace program. There were even discussions in the late '80s and early '90s about whether the bureau of Political-Military Affairs at the State Department should go away - how economic affairs were going to supplant defense issues. We began to see that that was not going to happen. I can talk, well, I don't know where you want to go with this, but the whole Balkan issue became central to the future of NATO.

Q: I'd like before we move to the Balkans, but we will go there, I'd like to continue sort of the French side and then we'll talk about the partnership for peace, partnership for peace isn't it?

BEECROFT: Right.

Q: Let's talk about the French though. What were they doing in this thing? I think the French NATO relationship has always been a very interesting one and also what were the Brits and particularly the Brits and the Germans and Benelux saying?

BEECROFT: In the North Atlantic Council, any ally can cast a veto. The NAC works on consensus. The French are marvelous bluffers. They will push something as long as they can, but at the end of the day, you know, some kind of arrangement to be found if you're creative enough to find it. They're not going to help you find it. You have to keep poking for it, probing. As a rule, the French stand alone in the North Atlantic Council with one exception, the Belgians. The Belgians virtually always go along with the French. They don't appear to me to have a foreign policy of their own, at least on defense issues. The Germans played a more nuanced role. The Germans would always quietly seek a compromise behind the scenes with the French, and try to find a way to accommodate. They liked acting as the middleman between Paris and Washington. The British, on the other hand, were seen as the American agents by the French. They tended to a large extent to take positions that were sympathetic to and supportive of the U.S. Then you had other Allies who were less predictable, the Italians, the Spanish, the Scandinavians.

Q: Greeks.

BEECROFT: The Greeks would sometimes lean in the direction of the French. The Turks would stay with the Americans. To the extent that there was a counterweight to Washington inside NATO, it came from Paris, even though as I mentioned before, the French don't play in the integrated military structure. The French have always been careful to keep enough money and enough equity in the structure so that they have to be taken seriously. Their problem was that their gambit was so transparent. And no other ally saw the French as a serious alternative to the Americans. I don't think the French could face that simple fact.

Q: Did you feel other than sticking it to the Americans in a way, did you feel that the French wanted NATO to do anything?

BEECROFT: No, not a whole lot, no.

Q: Did you have this Balkan thing looming up?

BEECROFT: Yes. That's exactly when it arose and it's a good illustration. In the spring of 1992, when the shelling of Sarajevo began and Serbia and Croatia were fighting a hot war over Eastern Slovenia, there was a lot of pressure from Washington for NATO to intervene. A lot of serious thought was being given to at least doing some planning. And this was, remember, the beginning of an election campaign in the U.S., and there was a need from Washington's point of view to get this out of the way quickly. Washington was also working the UN angle. There was a lot of debate in the North Atlantic Council about what NATO could do, and the French were deliberately digging in their heels and obstructing the effort. They argued that NATO was a defensive alliance and therefore had no business working outside the NATO area, although the Mediterranean is usually considered to be a NATO area, and that this was a European issue that should be left to the Europeans. When the U.S. proposed that there be active consultations between the UN, which was already diplomatically involved, and NATO, France vetoed that proposal because they argued that NATO had no business talking to the United Nations! They contended that NATO was a mere defense arrangement, whereas the United Nations was well, the United Nations. What the French finally agreed to was that the NATO could use some of its existing resources. They knew full well that only NATO had the ability to act. What that meant specifically was that a prepackaged NATO headquarters was dispatched to Zagreb to act as the core of a UN operation, not a NATO operation in the Balkans. So the two organizations landed between two stools. We had the worst of both worlds. France finally agreed that there could be not a dialogue, but communication between Brussels and New York, but only on specific operational matters, not policy. There could be no question of a policy dialogue as far as Paris was concerned. They argued that NATO was not an organization that had any role in policymaking. This attitude, by the way, surfaced again recently in the French resistance to any major NATO role in Iraq. It reflects France's constant care to minimize NATO's overall involvement in any action, because they're always looking for counterbalances to what they see as the excessive U.S. dominance not only of NATO, but of affairs on the European continent, and of those affairs through NATO. This debate went on for several months. As I say, we finally did manage to get a headquarters down there because the UN couldn't provide one, whereas NATO had the personnel and materiel ready on the shelf. Then we had the inglorious spectacle of two parallel chains of command that never touched. You had the political guidance going out of New York, the military guidance going out of Brussels in SHAPE, but they met in Zagreb in the glorious personage of Mr. Akashi - Yasushi Akashi, who never encountered a problem he wouldn't try to finesse.

Q: You might explain who he was.

BEECROFT: He was the UN Secretary General's Special Representative in the Balkans, in former Yugoslavia. Oh, and by the way, because the political guidelines were agreed on the basis of guidance from the United Nations, the only way that the Security Council including the U.S. - would agree to put troops on the ground was to define the Balkans operation as a Chapter Six operation. In the UN Charter, you have Chapter Six and Chapter Seven peace operations. Chapter Seven operations are relatively robust. You can take military action without waiting to be attacked. Chapter Six, which is a lot easier to get through the Security Council, assumes that you are operating in what is called, I swear to God, a benign environment. So for three years, from 1992 to '95, the UN told the world that a benign environment existed in the former Yugoslavia. That's why we ended up with the spectacle of United Nations troops being chained to link fences at weapon storage sites by the Serbs, taken hostage here and there. UNPROFOR's (United Nations Protection Force) tanks were painted white, and their drivers were given instructions that if an old lady sat down in the road, you were to do a U turn and drive your tank back the way it had come. So guess what? Soon there were lots of old ladies sitting down in the roads of the former Yugoslavia. A lot of us at NATO felt that we were involved in something that was undignified and unworthy of the greatest collective defense alliance in history.

Q: You had a Secretary of State to begin with after the election of '92, but that brings you up towards the end. You had a Secretary of State James Baker who had made the statement "We don't have a dog in this fight."

BEECROFT: That's right.

Q: So, and you had the Europeans saying the Europeans will do it, which of course for the Americans to have somebody else take on the problem was just joy unforeseen.

BEECROFT: It was music to the ears of Washington. We felt that we had done our duty by winning Operation Desert Storm. When the Europeans, as you say, told us "Okay, this is in our backyard we're happy to take it on," Washington was every bit as happy. We replied, in effect, "Let us hold your coats." Then when Jim Baker said "We have no dog in this fight," that sealed the deal. It also sealed the deal with Milosevi?, because he understood that we weren't going to get involved - and we didn't.

Q: A couple of things. One was just an attitude because of the situation, in Desert Storm; you got there after Desert Storm. Was there a concern in NATO about the military people talking about things like the French air force couldn't really go into battle unless they were accompanied by American planes that would tell them where to go. I mean in other words the equipment, the NATO equipment was falling seriously behind the American one, is this a concern?

BEECROFT: It was certainly common knowledge. If you went down to SHAPE and talked to people there, it was of concern, but again, this wasn't Iraq. This was Europe's backyard and there was a feeling, rightly or wrongly, that you wouldn't need the kind of massive maneuver space in the Balkans that you would need in Iraq. So I don't think the disparity would have been enough to discourage NATO from acting. NATO always acts in the knowledge that the U.S. is the 800-pound gorilla.

Q: I would imagine there must have been on the part of NATO military professionals gnashing of teeth about what was going on in the Balkans where they were having a drunken Serb guerrilla leader would tell them to get off the road and they'd have to, this sort of thing.

BEECROFT: Well, that's exactly right. It was about this time that the horrible term "ethnic cleansing" came along and that reports of terrible atrocities began to emerge - concentration camps, emaciated people, mass murder. Lord Paddy Ashdown, who is now the High Representative in Sarajevo and was the head of the Liberal Democratic group in Parliament then, made a couple of trips into Republika Srpska and returned with harrowing descriptions of encountering people in these camps who looked like they'd just emerged from Auschwitz. Gaunt figures who would emerge from barbed-wired pens and say things like "We know we have a half an hour to live, please tell our families." I have to say that there was still a feeling that it couldn't possibly get as bad as it did. There were still the remnants of this end-of-the-Cold-War euphoria, so that there was a certain amount of denial. In the first half of the '90s, the defense budgets in the NATO alliance just tanked. You talked about the disparities that existed in 1991 between U.S. forces and everybody else's. Those disparities only got worse. The defense budgets in the U.S. didn't go up either, but we already had such a head start that it hardly mattered. In 1992, there was an election campaign going on in the U.S. It was also about the time that Helmut Kohl began running into political trouble in Germany, politically and economically. And NATO was beginning more and more to define itself through the Partnership for Peace rather than collective defense - how do we assimilate these new countries that want very much to be members of the alliance? I think PfP really saved the alliance.

Q: What was the French view of bringing these other countries in?

BEECROFT: They knew from the very first that it was a winner. They did everything they could to make it tough. The French are very good at this. What they do is ask question lots of questions: What is the logical reason for this? How would you see it happening? Why is in the alliance's interest? How is it related to security? So the French made everyone go through a lot of hoops to get there, but at the end of the day they didn't stand in the way. It just took much longer than it could have. But you have to give them some credit. They did force us to clarify what we had in mind. The idea, for example, that whereas NATO membership could be the end result of joining the Partnership for Peace, it wasn't necessarily the end result. That was very helpful in getting the Russians to accept PfP, because no one wanted the Russians to be NATO members, but we did want them to be inside the tent. Frankly, Russia didn't want to be a NATO member anyway, except under circumstances that we would never agree to. We also came to agreement very early on that there would be no laundry lists created by NATO for PfP membership. You wouldn't, say, hand Warsaw a checklist of 15 specific actions it had to take to be admitted. Instead, NATO would negotiate an arrangement, an agreement with each candidate on the requirements for being a member of the Partnership. One size did not fit all. Everybody's approach to the Partnership would be different.

Q: Were you involved in drawing up the list, I mean not the list, but the requirements?

BEECROFT: Sure.

Q: How did you see, let's take Poland to begin with. What were our concerns about Poland?

BEECROFT: The Partnership for Peace was a military-to-military arrangement. We in the Political-Economic unite would keep a political eye on it. The geography of the NATO headquarters building is interesting. It has a long central corridor, and on one side of it are the delegation offices. On the other side of it are the milreps, military representatives. One of the peculiarities that goes right back to the founding of NATO in the late '40s was that the defense ministries have their own separate network. In other words, the military representative, who is a two-star in the U.S. system, does not report to the Ambassador. He has his own channel to the Pentagon. The milreps were actively involved in these conversations, I wouldn't call them negotiations, with the various candidate countries. The focus was on the size of the military, the military budget, the shape of the military, what the mission would be, what the doctrine would look like.

There were three fundamental requirements at the very beginning of Partnership for Peace. The first and most important was civilian control of the military. The second was transparency in military budgeting. None of the Warsaw Pact countries had a civilian defense minister, or if they did it was someone who had formerly worn a uniform. Transparency in military budgeting was important because we had no idea what the Warsaw Pact was spending on defense. We thought that this was key, and it would also involve parliament. So, it reinforced civilian control. The third requirement was the requirement that military doctrine be based on defense, not offense, because what always worried us about the Warsaw Pact was its offensive philosophy. The temptation would always be there to go nuclear in response. Those were the three fundamental requirements.

Q: When all is said and done, from your perspective in our mission in NATO, what was the idea of the partnership for peace? Was this against the Soviet Union to make sure we didn't have some rogue states floating around, keeping them under control?

BEECROFT: There were a lot of good reasons for it. One was because we didn't want the various former satellite states to go off in different directions. We wanted to bring them into the tent, and they wanted desperately to be in the tent. Ironically, PfP recalled the offer Truman made to Stalin in 1946 to provide Marshall Plan aid. Stalin vetoed the idea. As in 1946, we said to the Russians right up front, this isn't just something we would like, all of Europe's invited, we very much hope you will do this and we will work with you on a program that responds to and respects your specific concerns. Eventually they agreed. I don't know if they would agree now, but they agreed then. We were very careful never to be triumphalist about it. Not to say we won the Cold War, but to see this as an opportunity to get beyond the polarization and the confrontational relationship that existed for half a century. And that's the way we put it to them. We never talked about winners and losers. I think it was a terrific idea at the right time, and now, having just come back from the Balkans, the Balkan states are desperate to get in the Partnership for Peace. This is not a flash in the pan. It continues to be seen as in everybody's interest to be in the partnership.

Q: Were you looking at this with NATO in a way of putting everybody in the tent, I mean in many ways NATO is one to keep the Soviets out, but to keep the Germans down, but basically to keep the Germans and French from going at each other. Was there, did you see the signs just sort of keeping restive armies quiet? Was somebody looking ahead to seeing this as saying, okay, maybe we should have the Poles provide communications and the Hungarians apply mountain troopers, to some other purpose?

BEECROFT: No, not at that early stage. As I say there was a work plan, but the purpose of the work plan, which was very often left to SHAPE in its details, was to redefine, to reinvent if you will, the militaries of Eastern Europe consistent with those in the Western alliance in terms of their structure, their command and control, the way they were funded and how they related to each other. It was very much focused on the militaries as such. Obviously the question soon began to be asked, okay, PfP to do what? That's where the more political side of this came in. A number of these countries they are now full NATO members because they chose to use PfP as a stepping stone to full membership. There were others that are partners - of course there's Russia, but there's also the Ukraine for example. There are the Baltic States, who at that point were not seen as serious candidates for NATO membership, but that has now changed. Look what's happened to Bulgaria and Romania. They were seen as very far from membership, they're now members. PfP morphed, it evolved into a more political activity as it went along. That was always certainly in the backs of people's minds, that it wouldn't stay just as a military-to-military arrangement, but it was a good place to start.

Q: Well, now there you're sitting in Brussels and I would think that you've got another development going on with the European Union which was developing teeth and God knows regulations. I mean it seemed to be a real mill for churning out regulations and then you've got the OSCE. Were you seeing, was there a conflict? I mean were there problems with these various?

BEECROFT: I can deal with the OSCE matter quickly. At that point it was still the CSCE. It became the OSCE in '94. The CSCE at that point was widely seen as a second-order organization whose purpose had been largely fulfilled with the end of the Cold War and the Warsaw Pact. Remember the whole Helsinki process. So, the CSCE, like so many organizations at the time was searching for a mission. There wasn't even a dialogue to speak of between NATO and the OSCE. There is now by the way, but there wasn't then. You say the European Union was getting teeth. I'd say it had gums, but no teeth and frankly, where security is concerned its teeth are still pretty small, baby teeth. The first real test is coming now, with the European Union taking over from NATO in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That's a 7,000-person presence. It's quite significant and we'll see how they do. There have been very careful negotiations between NATO and the European Union on how these various assets, which are largely NATO assets, are going to be used absent NATO command and control. The commander of the European Union force is a Brit. This is a so-called Berlin-plus arrangement, which defines practical work between EU and NATO in crisis management operations. Under Berlin-plus, an EU force can make use of NATO planning, assets and capabilities when it goes into the field. In other words, although this will be a European Union operation, NATO will still have equities involved. There will also be a NATO office in Sarajevo, which will help develop the defense ministry in Bosnia. All of this supplants the old Western European Union, the WEU.

Q: Was that the coal and steel community?

BEECROFT: That's right. It came out of the discussions that took place in 1948 between the French, the Brits, and the Benelux countries.

Q: Is that Monnet and all that?

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: Yes.

BEECROFT: The WEU, Western European Union, was described 10 years ago as a sleeping beauty. It had a small office in downtown Brussels, but nobody paid it much attention. The French used the WEU quite successfully as the basis for an eventual EU defense component. The WEU's role was subsumed into the European Union itself in the late '90s, but it was the stalking horse that the French were using at that point. They were potting the WEU forward as a potential alternative to NATO.

Q: What were you getting from your German, British, Italian, Belgian colleagues and Dutch colleagues about this French maneuvering?

BEECROFT: A lot of rolling of eyes and shaking of heads, but at the end of the day they were content to stand back and watch the French and Americans fight. It was great entertainment. There was a basic assumption that at the end of the day the French were not willing or perhaps able to wreck the alliance, but that they were going to continue to probe to see whether the European Community could eventually be developed as a counterweight to NATO. Now, this was the Clinton era, at least for the second and third year I was there. Clinton was basically seen benevolently by Europeans. Nowadays, you will find people in places like Belgium or the Netherlands or Germany who, I think, would be more supportive of a strong European Union defense capability than they would have been 10 years ago. The problem is that defense costs money, and high defense budgets are a hard political sell in Europe.

Q: By the time you left there in?

BEECROFT: '94.

Q: '94, by the time you left, how were things playing out in Bosnia?

BEECROFT: Oh, they were awful. It was a subject of great shame and embarrassment that here was NATO, contributing a pittance - headquarters and logistical support - to a UN mission whose rules of engagement were quite robust enough, had they had chosen to use them, but because of political guidance from the UN. in New York they wouldn't use them. You had the worst of all worlds. The fiction of a benign environment. In Bosnia two million out of four million people either made refugees or killed. Milosevi? basically having his way. Tudjman having his way too, fighting a shadow war in Eastern Slovenia while dividing up Bosnia, or trying to. It was shameful.

Q: This must again, was in the professional ranks, speaking not only to the military, but the Foreign Service and all, a deep and almost abiding contempt for the UN as an instrument.

BEECROFT: Yes. I think Bosnia the process, which has gone on ever since, of defining the limits of the UN, first by admitting that there were limits. You see, there was a widespread belief in the early '90s that war-fighting as such was over. History was over, the Warsaw Pact was dead, its former members clamoring to get into the Partnership for Peace. There wouldn't be any more wars, so what was the mission of, or need for, military forces? But the militaries are organizations made up of human beings, and they preferred looking for a new role to presiding over their own demise. The new role that everybody jumped at was peace operations, which in turn produced a lot of theology. There were peacekeeping, peace enforcement and peacemaking, and you had people trying to define each of these in different ways. Peacekeeping meant deploying forces in a conflict-free environment, which you wanted to maintain. Peacemaking meant a Chapter 7 operation, in which the forces would act aggressively and robustly as required. And peace enforcement meant moving in after the shooting had stopped and keeping things quiet.

What began to put some reality back into this? Well, Somalia for one thing. That was in 1993. The spectacle of U.S. Marines landing on a beach outside of Mogadishu in the glare of CNN spotlights - you can imagine the comments of the military professionals in Brussels: "What is this, showbiz? It's a good thing there were no bullets flying." Well, not that long afterwards, we had Blackhawk Down. Without anyone understanding how or why, the mission morphed from peacekeeping to peacemaking. The term "mission creep" entered the lexicon.

Q: And to feed people. I mean there was a huge tragedy going on, the ability to deliver food.

BEECROFT: Yes, no food, no water. Eventually you had these professional soldiers, many of whom were American, who didn't really know what their mission was. There's a lot of quoting of Clausewitz around the National War College. One of his aphorisms that I like the most says "No one starts a war-or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so-without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it." Put another way, you have to know what kind of war you're fighting, and what you want to get out of it. And we didn't know. We went into Somalia without defining the mission, both political and military and that was an important lesson learned when we went into Bosnia a couple of years later.

Q: But we hadn't gone into Bosnia when you were there?

BEECROFT: No.

Q: I mean were people in the backroom drawing up plans and looking at logistics and things like that?

BEECROFT: I think there were probably more people doing that in the Pentagon than in Brussels, but there must have been people at SHAPE as well, which is not in Brussels and where the French don't play.

Q: You mentioned the French weren't in SHAPE because these were the actual military forces.

BEECROFT: Right. They do have a military liaison mission, but they don't play actively.

Q: I would think that there would be a certain amount of pressure from NATO to SHAPE in getting things done if you can just to keep the bloody French from screwing things up.

BEECROFT: Here's another good example. There was a big debate in '93 and '94 when it became clear that the Yugoslavia crisis was not going to go away anytime soon. The U.S., with British support and some sympathy from some of the continental allies, began urging NATO to start doing contingency planning - a key phrase - for eventual operations into the Balkans. The French objected. They said no, this is not the role of NATO or SHAPE. Of course it was precisely the role of SHAPE to do contingency planning for the Balkans. Then I don't remember who it was, it might have been Reggie Bartholomew, somebody said, well, if contingency planning is off the table, is there any problem if NATO does some contingency thinking? And the French replied No problem, it's limited to thinking and not planning. You could see the looks around the room. What's the difference between contingency thinking and contingency planning? What it revealed to me was how carefully the French had mapped and schemed and thought this all out beforehand. They didn't object to our having some clear ideas in case the military had to go in, but they didn't want to formalize the process to an extent where it could supplant what the UN was doing or give NATO too much immediate credibility. Contingency thinking is deniable - you're just thinking about it. And if you're writing it down, don't tell me about it.

Q: Yes.

BEECROFT: That's what was agreed. Contingency thinking was okay. Contingency planning was not.

Q: What about Srebrenica? Had that happened?

BEECROFT: No. Srebrenica happened in the summer of 1995.

Q: By the time you left there in '94, when did you leave in '94?

BEECROFT: The summer of '94.

Q: What did you think was going to happen? I mean let's look at the big picture. You had the partnership for peace, you had the French burr under the saddle and you had the Balkans falling apart. What did you think was going to come out of that?

BEECROFT: I think most of us were of the belief that it was not a question of whether, but of when NATO would use real force in Bosnia, and that's why the contingency thinking was so important. It meant that when NATO did finally respond in the summer of '95, the plans were there.

Q: Was there a feeling while you were still there the military saying, you know, a whiff of grapeshot is going to put these Serbs or the Bosnian Serbs, it's not going to take a hell of a lot.

BEECROFT: I think people at that point weren't sure. My conviction has always been that if NATO had reacted quickly in 1991, at the very beginning, when the shells first began falling on Dubrovnik, the Serbs would have backed off. The Serbs had massed artillery on this mountain looking down on Dubrovnik, a world heritage site, one of the most beautiful cities in the world. If NATO had simply dispatched one or two Italian gunboats and taken out that artillery, it would have been over, but by '94 the Serbs had the momentum and no one was pushing back. I don't think anyone was too sure that a whiff of grapeshot would do it. The circumstances, the military circumstances had changed by the summer of '95 so that people were more ready to believe that the Serbs were vulnerable than they seemed in '94.

Q: This was after the collapse of the.

BEECROFT: It was after Operation Storm.

Q: This was where the Croats took the.

BEECROFT: That's it.

Q: What was the name of the area?

BEECROFT: Krajina..

Q: Krajina, yes.

BEECROFT: The Croatian army pushed the Serbs out of Krajina in 1995, Operation Storm. Then they moved into Bosnia and Herzegovina, combined forces with the Bosniaks, the Muslims, and moved on Banja Luka, the de facto capital of the Republika Srpska. Actually the RS government was in Pale, outside Sarajevo, but Banja Luka was the key Serb-controlled city. Both Washington and Brussels were concerned that if the Croats took Banja Luka, if there was a total Bosnian Serb defeat, the consequences could be really serious. The Serbian army would intervene, the war would get worse, and there would be a new and even bloodier phase.

Q: Well, then okay, '94 whither?

BEECROFT: Amman, Jordan.

Q: You've kind of bounced around, Africa, Middle East and come back to Europe.

BEECROFT: That's right. Having discovered that the rest of the world existed, I found that I rather liked it and I was looking for a next post outside Europe. I've always felt that the key word in Foreign Service Officer was Foreign. I enjoyed being overseas a lot more than being in Washington. So, I looked around. I thought either I want to be an ambassador in a small post or a DCM in an interesting larger post. The ambassadorship list that summer was just not very good and there was almost nothing in Europe. Having served in Egypt, I went back to NEA to see what might be available and was told, well, if you want to go to Jordan, Amman is a very interesting place. The Ambassador, it turned out, was Wes Egan. Wes had worked for Larry Eagleburger when he was Under Secretary for Management. I was next door in the Office of the Deputy Secretary in the mid '70s. Wes and I and our wives had dinner together and agreed it would be fun to be together again. That summer, 1994, Mette and I moved from Brussels to Amman.

Q: Okay, you were in Amman from when to when?

BEECROFT: '94 to '96.

Q: First, I just talked to Egan two days ago. We've been doing a series of interviews then he went off to Kenya, but now he's back. We'll be continuing this, but what was his background and how did he operate?

BEECROFT: Let's see, Wes had been ambassador once before, in Guinea-Bissau, in the '80's. Wes is a person of very high standards and great integrity, a superb reader of people fundamentally a realist. He likes an embassy to work well. He cares about his people and he has a great sense of humor. He has a marvelous wife, Virginia. They are a great couple. My wife Mette and Virginia had known each other from Family Liaison Office, so that was a good fit. As I said, the four of us met in Washington spring of 1994 and agreed, okay, let's do it.

Q: You got out there in '94?

BEECROFT: Got out there in the summer of '94, just in time to become control officer for President Clinton's trip to Jordan in October to sign the Jordan-Israel peace treaty. That brought the president and 800 of his closest friends in four jumbo jets to Amman.

Q: How did that go?

BEECROFT: Oh, it was quite spectacular. The signing of the treaty took place at Wadi Araba, which is an open flat area just north of Aqaba and Eilat, the twin cities on the Gulf. Fortunately it was October, so it was only about 95 in the shade rather than 115. They had set up bleachers on a recently tarred parking area right on the Jordan-Israel boundary line, where the customs posts were later set up. El Al Alia Airways supplied lots of little spring water bottles and Royal Jordanian Airways provided baseball caps. Here you had Bill Clinton, Yitzhak Rabin and King Hussein up on the podium, and the atmosphere was great. Rabin and King Hussein had a terrific relationship, and Clinton was basking in the spirit of the moment.

Q: Had it been one that had really gone back for some time?

BEECROFT: Oh, yes.

Q: I mean they had been meeting clandestinely kind of. Everybody knew it, but.

BEECROFT: Correct. To this day, on a hill just north of Jerusalem on the Ramallah road, you can still see the palace that King Hussein had half-completed when the 1967 war broke out. King Hussein flew clandestinely to Jerusalem in his helicopter to meet with Rabin and set the stage for the peace agreement. It was based on the Oslo Accords and the concepts that had been worked out in Madrid by Secretary Baker. Now Warren Christopher had taken the next step. We had a control office in a hotel right down on the beach, a hotel that was owned by somebody in the government's uncle or nephew, I can't remember. We had the usual White House advance people who came in, and everything was timed. We had tested the motorcade on a dry run, reconnoitered the road to the airport, etc. We were in pretty good shape. President Clinton's huge aircraft had landed at Aqaba Airport, they weren't even sure the runway would handle it, but it did. Then the King comes with his plane and Rabin in his, so here are these huge birds lined up. And Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev arrives comes in this little trimotor jet. Somehow it was symbolic of how the Russian position in the world had shrunk. Yes, they had been sponsors of the Oslo process. They had been at Madrid. He was there, but he was irrelevant. He got no respect.

Anyway, we had this big ceremony at 3:00 in the afternoon. A platform was set up for the VIP Clinton, King Hussein, Rabin - with bleachers for the invited guests. The ceremony was not too long and well organized. As soon as it was over, all the dignitaries, plus the invited guests and the press, scrambled to get back to a plane. The reason was that President Clinton was scheduled to speak that evening to the Jordanian Parliament in Amman. He was the first American president ever to speak to a Jordanian parliament, or to an Arab parliament, not just Jordanian. No one knew who was going to get on what plane. It was literally a royal scramble. Rabin did not come to Amman, but my wife and I ended up on a Royal Jordanian Airlines plane full of sheikhs. We actually took off before the president's plane, which was a good thing because we got to Amman Airport in time to be there when the president arrived. It was entirely luck. Talk about playing it by ear. All you could do was enjoy the ride and keep your fingers crossed. We had a motorcade ready at Amman airport to take the president to the guest palace he was staying in. We were concerned that King Hussein would do what he had done with the Queen of the Netherlands a couple of weeks earlier, when she arrived at the airport for a state visit, and he drove her personally to the palace. We could just see him drive up and say to the president, "Hop in, Bill!" This terrified the Secret Service people because Bill would undoubtedly have hopped in. The king also had a half a dozen Harleys. The Jordanians, who are among the world's most hospitable people, really couldn't fathom that the Secret Service would not let the president ride with the king. After the visit, it took all the Embassy's diplomatic skill and six months of careful stroking to mollify Royal Jordanian Protocol. Anyway, we got the president's car at the front of the queue and he went in his own car, which had been flown in for the occasion. The president's motorcade drove directly to the royal guesthouse, which is right on the edge of the escarpment that looks down on the Dead Sea. When you look west from this palace, you're looking right at Jerusalem, 50 miles away as the crow flies. The presidential party was very impressed, and Jordanian Royal Protocol did a superb job, as usual.

We got to the Jordanian National Assembly about an hour and a quarter late, about 9 pm, but no one cared. It was great. Clinton is masterful at working a crowd, including parliamentarians. He had them eating out of his hand. His speech was excellent. I have to say that the people from the White House were very impressed with Jordanians' superb organization. King Hussein and his son and successor Abdullah both attended Sandhurst. When I was in Amman, Abdullah was the head of the Jordanian Special Forces. What really mollified Jordanian Protocol was that the visit had gone so well and they'd gotten a lot of good international coverage. Clinton's speech to the Parliament was a smashing success.

Q: You were there from '94 to '96?

BEECROFT: Yes. Two years.

Q: What was the situation in Jordan?

BEECROFT: Well, things were basically looking up at that point. You still had the phenomenon of a country whose population was 50% Palestinian. You had an economy that was none too strong, because their main trading partner had been Iraq and that option was now closed off with a few exceptions, which I can speak to. That was one reason why Hussein finally decided to take the leap with Israel. The old joke about Jordan being located between Iraq and a hard place had a lot of truth to it. King Hussein was looking for alternatives. Egypt, the biggest and most important Arab country, had long since signed a peace treaty with Israel, although it was a cold peace, and had been readmitted to the Arab league. Basically, Hussein didn't see a downside. I have to say that for the first year or so after the treaty was signed, the signs were positive. Just to give you an example, the Israelis opened a blue jeans factory in Irbid, which is the northernmost major city in Jordan, near the border with Syria. Jordanians were making blue jeans which were then being shipped to Israel, with labels on them that said "made in Israel," and everyone was happy. There was work for the people of Irbid and good quality blue jeans being exported from the region as Israeli. There were other courageous people, lawyers, local entrepreneurs who were looking for ways to open doors with the Israelis, and a few courageous Israelis trying to do the same thing. In late October of '95, the first annual Middle East/North African Economic Summit was held in Amman something the U.S. had been pressing hard for. King Hussein was the patron. The Gulf States and North Africans were well represented. Arafat was there. Rabin and a big delegation came from Israel. Secretary Christopher led our delegation. The Europeans were there in force. There were more than a thousand businesspeople there from all over the region. It went so well that even the organizers were surprised. Perhaps the liveliest debate at the whole conference may have been who would host it in 1996; Egypt got the nod, with Qatar in 1997.

The U.S. Embassy had a big display at the Marriott Hotel with all kinds of state-of-the-art computer stuff. I took Arafat around to see our displays. He was fascinated he kept saying "I want this" to his staff. Then, one week after the summit, Rabin was dead.

Q: How did that hit you, the embassy and all when you heard that?

BEECROFT: I think we all felt that he was so crucial to providing the political will necessary to drive the process. You may recall that King Hussein went to the memorial ceremony in Israel.

Q: Yes, I remember.

BEECROFT: And cried. He had good reason to cry. There was simply no one who could fill his shoes. No one else had his combination of vision and credibility. Rabin was a general. He fought in the 1948 war and was Army Chief of Staff during the six-day-war, so his domestic credentials were impeccable. Here he was in 1995, leading the charge for reconciliation with an Arab king whose country was over 50% Palestinian. By the way, one of the things we at Embassy Amman did during that period was to help facilitate the opening of the Israeli embassy in Jordan. Many Jordanians were fascinated by the fact that an Israeli embassy was opening, because so many Palestinians living in Jordan saw it as an opportunity to get visas and go visit family, and they did just that.

Q: Was there an immediate shut down in everything?

BEECROFT: No. It was a gradual tailing-off. Here's an example of how promising things had seemed. This was, oh, I guess a couple of months after the peace treaty had been signed. Both our children were in school in the States, and came over for Christmas '94, a couple of months after the peace treaty was signed. I managed to make arrangements with the Israelis and the Jordanians to drive my private car into Israel with Jordanian license plates, Jordanian dip plates. We had a Peugeot 505, good robust simple car. I knew both bridge commanders at the Allenby Bridge, the one on the Jordanian side and the one on the Israeli side. The one on the Israeli side happened to be the commander at the entry point at Rafah, Gaza ten years earlier, when I had been assigned to Cairo. The commander on the Jordanian side came from a town called Salt. The Saltis are show me, the Missourians of Jordan. It's where the first capital of Jordan was located before it moved to Amman. This guy was always looking for green cards and visas for his relatives. Anyway, we drove our car down the great escarpment, across the Allenby Bridge, which included separate coffees with each commander. Then through Jericho, up the western side of the escarpment and right into Jerusalem. You should have seen the double-takes. We drove from Jerusalem down to Tel Aviv. We drove all over Israel with Jordanian plates. It's unthinkable now, but this is less than 10 years ago.

Q: When you got to Jordan, what were you picking up from the desk and the bureau and all of Hussein, King Hussein? I mean what kind of a person was he.

BEECROFT: I just can't find superlatives enough. Hussein had his human weaknesses, of course, including mistresses in places like London. But he was also a man who had devoted his entire life to making Jordan viable - a real country, in spite of the fact that its population is split between East and West Bankers and has few natural resources. He also felt that as the sole Hashemite still on the throne, he had to protect and preserve his family's role in the Middle East. First the Hashemites lost their historic position to the Saudis as the keepers of the holy places of Mecca and Medina. Then the Iraqi branch of the family was slaughtered in 1958, with one exception, Prince Ra'ad, who lived two blocks away from us in Amman. Ra'ad was studying at Oxford when his family was killed and has never entertained thoughts of reclaiming the Hashemite throne in Baghdad. Hussein was very careful to groom a series of sons as potential successors. His brother Hassan was the crown prince, but as you saw, when the chips were down, Hassan was brushed aside. Hussein was married four times and produced a number of sons as well as daughters. The children were urbane, well educated, and thoroughly inculcated with that it means to be a Hashemite prince or princess. They all had a strong sense of responsibility. Anyone who had any dealings with King Hussein came away feeling that he'd been in the presence of somebody very special. He always called you sir - how are you today, sir? He had a house in Potomac, Maryland, and came here often.

Q: His mother was here.

BEECROFT: His mother?

Q: His wife.

BEECROFT: One of his wives.

Q: One of his wives.

BEECROFT: There were four wives, but seriatim. Noor, of course, was an American. The second, Queen Alia, was the love of his life. She is buried in a beautiful mausoleum at one of the palaces, just outside of Amman. Although Hussein wasn't always faithful, he was always devoted. And he was amazingly deferential. I'll give you an example. When Ambassador Wes Egan paid his initial courtesy call on the King, Hussein asks him, "Sir, would you mind if I smoke?" And the ambassador replied with a smile, "Your Majesty, it's your kingdom. You can do whatever you want." Hussein had a warm sense of humor. He appreciated that. There was an immediate bonding. Hussein's connections with the U.S. Embassy were very close. Earlier in his reign, the U.S. had helped sustain him when the going was rough - not so much with Israel, although of course he had been one of the big losers in the Six-Day War, but with Syria. The Syrians had tried more than once to eliminate King Hussein. They tried to shoot his plane down in the 1970's. That's one reason he was always closer to the Iraqis than he was ever to the Syrians.

Q: What about relations with Iraq at the time you were there?

BEECROFT: Hussein, as you'll recall, did not support the United States during the first Gulf War. He felt that he had no option but to stay neutral, because he knew that Saddam Hussein had an army that could easily punch its way to Amman, and he also would have risked surrounding Jordan with enemies on all sides. This came into play again during my time in Amman, when two of Saddam's daughters and their husbands crossed into Jordan in the summer of '95. The husbands were senior military officers and well informed about his clandestine programs. King Hussein put them in a guest palace for the better part of six months, the same palace, ironically, where Bill and Hillary had stayed the previous year. As you can imagine, U.S. and Jordanian agencies debriefed these guys at length. Meanwhile, Saddam's daughters are growing increasingly restless in the guest palace. They had had visions of going on to the great shopping spots of Europe, and here they were, birds in a gilded cage - a beautiful palace, but what are you going to do there? So, after several months passed by, Saddam's son Uday arrived with a message: all is forgiven, please come home. Initially, they didn't bite. As I understand the story, the sons-in-law went to King Hussein and said, Your Majesty, we appreciate your hospitality, but we think the time has come to move on to Europe. Hussein responded, Absolutely, go with my blessing. Only one thing: your wives may not go with you. The outcome of all this was - after what I'm sure some very interesting conversations between the husbands and their wives - the decision was taken to go back to Iraq.

Q: Back to Iraq.

BEECROFT: Based on the assurance from Uday that they would be pardoned. So in the winter of 1996, they went to the border crossing on the Baghdad road. Across the border, there two motorcades. One for each couple, right? Wrong. The two husbands were put in one motorcade and the two wives, the daughters of Saddam, in the other one. Both motorcades left for Baghdad. The husbands were never seen alive again.

Q: Why didn't Hussein allow the wives to go?

BEECROFT: There are claims that he felt he had some kind of blood debt to Saddam. For whatever reason, the King felt that he could not and would not offend or provoke Saddam Hussein by allowing the couples to go on. My understanding is that Saddam did a very Arab thing. He did not take out the two sons. He simply made it clear to their families that they had better deal with the two sons, and they did. Meanwhile, Saddam's daughters are back in Jordan, this time as refugees.

Q: Were there, what were we doing with Jordan vis-à-vis Iraq during this time because there was an embargo on and all?

BEECROFT: Let's say that there was quite a bit going on, but I can't talk about it. We certainly were paying a lot of attention to what was happening to the east of Jordan.

Q: Was terrorism a concern of ours?

BEECROFT: Not so much. There was concern about what was then called security. Remember that we had had a very significant presence in Amman. An embassy that was one of the first purpose-built, security-reinforced Inman buildings. It's actually a rather handsome building, built of white stone, like virtually all the other buildings in Amman and Jerusalem, on a hilltop which at that point was pretty much empty. It's now been surrounded by palatial houses, including the residence of the Israeli ambassador, which was always seen as not a coincidence, although it was. In fact, there were rumors of a secret tunnel between the American Embassy and the Israeli ambassador's residence. Absolute nonsense.

Anyway, it was one of the first Inman buildings, with thick bulletproof windows. You couldn't open them, of course. As DCM, I spent a lot of time dealing with the RSO -

Q: Regional Security Officer.

BEECROFT: - Regional Security Officer, checking out at the housing of our staff. Looking back, I wouldn't say we were nonchalant, but we were a lot less paranoid than we are now. There wasn't the sense of imminent threat that's an everyday reality now.

Q: How did you find were there any oh, incidents, problems or anything like that during the time you were there?

BEECROFT: In short, no. When did the Khobar Towers get bombed? Was that '96? I think so.

Q: I'm not sure.

BEECROFT: Looking back on it, I was there at the last golden moment. We left Amman in the summer of '96. We drove back to Israel once more in my private car after Rabin's assassination, so things were still good enough in the spring of '96 so we could do that then. Try parking a Jordanian-plated car in Jerusalem now.

Q: How about relations with Saudi Arabia?

BEECROFT: Jordan's dealings with Saudi have historically been fairly chilly because of bitter memories of the expulsion of the Hashemites from the holy places, but also because the Jordanians tend to look at the Saudis as a bunch of country bumpkins who lucked out in taking over the holy sites and then in finding oil. There's no oil in Jordan - no natural resources of any kind to speak of. The one time every year that the Jordanians were compelled to deal actively with the Saudis was when the Hajj came around, because there were always negotiations about arrangements for bus and air transit. You'd see pilgrims from Turkey, Syria and Palestine. Then in the summer you would see some Saudi cars, when they took their vacations. You'd see cars from the Gulf and Saudi, because there were plenty of relatives working in the Gulf who had come back, but Jordan was also seen as a nice place to go - which it is. A great tourist destination.

Q: The Jordanians are they basically Sunni or are they Sunni or Shiites?

BEECROFT: Overwhelmingly Sunni.

Q: So, there was no Iranian connection?

BEECROFT: Absolutely none. We had nothing to do with the Iranians. They had no influence in Jordan.

Q: Well, this is probably a good place to stop. Bob, where did you go in '96?

BEECROFT: Well, in May my wife and I came back for our daughter's graduation from the University of Pennsylvania. As one tends to do, one stops at the Department for consultations. I dropped in on an old friend, John Kornblum, who at that point was a DAS in EUR. He was looking for somebody to go to Sarajevo. He said, sounding like the U.S. Army, I want you. That was one of the most wrenching experiences of my career because it was a hugely tempting offer - Special Envoy to the Bosnian Federation. Mette and I agonized about it, because we loved Jordan, but I saw so much that went to my roots and my soul that I finally went to NEA and met with DAS Bob Pelletreau. I told him, I have had this offer and I think I should accept. Bob said, If I were in your shoes I'd do the same thing. That's what I like about NEA. It's a bureau that has always been good to its people. He understood I couldn't say no to this. So we left Jordan a year early. Mette came back here I went to Sarajevo. I said to Kornblum, "I will go, but only if I can turn my predecessor's approach to the job around." He had spent 90% of his time in Washington and periodically gone to Sarajevo for short TDY's. I felt that to make it work, I'd have to live there.

Q: Who was that?

BEECROFT: Dan Serwer who is now doing great work at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Kornblum said, "I hoped you would say that." So I ended up in Sarajevo in August '96.

Q: All right. We'll pick it up then.

Today is the 23rd of November, 2004. Bob, Sarajevo, '96, what was the situation at the time you went there?

BEECROFT: I arrived in August. The shooting had stopped six months earlier. It was - I wouldn't even call it a country, it was a collection of peoples who were still in a state of collective shock at what they had done to themselves and each other. You soon began hearing tales of those first few days in the spring of 1992, when Sarajevo was first targeted by Serb cannon and tanks and mortars. Everybody, whatever their ethnicity, all said the same thing: this is obviously just a passing phase. It won't last. Well, it did last. It lasted for three and a half years. People are still getting over it. I can tell you because I just left there last July, when I finished my second tour in Sarajevo. The first time, in '96, I went out as Special Envoy to the Bosnian Federation. There are two so-called entities inside Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of them is primarily, but not totally Croat and Bosniak, Bosniak being Muslim. That's the Federation. The other is overwhelmingly Serb, the so-called Republika Srpska, or RS. Now, at that time the RS was sort of a pariah, because we had Radovan Karadzic running around, he still is running around.

Q: And Mladić, too.

BEECROFT: Well, Mladić is probably in Belgrade, but he's certainly in the neighborhood. They put me up in the Sarajevo Holiday Inn, which had been built for the Olympics in '84. It was one of these horrible Yugoslav modern monstrosities, built of mustard-color panels, and of course it was full of bullet holes. Even at this point, several months after the shooting had stopped, you didn't want a room on the so-called Sniper Alley side of the building. The going rate for a room fluctuated, but it was usually about \$250 cash per night, to stay in this building that had no working elevators, intermittent electricity, and no air conditioning - and it was summer. The only way to get up to your room, and I was on the fifth floor, was to climb what had been the emergency staircase, which had been pounded to rubble, so you were holding the railing and inching yourself up and down this pile of fragmented concrete. It was quite an adventure. There was a row of overturned buses and old shipping containers that went from the side exit of the hotel to the corner of the nearest city block. This had provided cover while the shooting was still going on, and it was still the most direct way to get to the Embassy, several blocks away. After the Dayton Accords went into force at the end of '95, NATO came in in very heavy, 60,000 troops of whom 28,000 were Americans. NATO finally did what the UN had failed to do, and that was stop the shooting and begin to create the conditions necessary to create a state.

The Dayton Accords are still in force. The Bosnian Constitution is Annex Four of the Dayton Accords, drafted at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base Dayton and in Washington by State Department lawyers. My job was to try to get the Croats, who are Catholics, and the Bosniaks, who are Muslims, to work together and make the Federation succeed. The Croats and the Bosniaks together constituted 51% of the territory and something like 60% of the population. There was a certain logic in the Bosniaks and Croats working together, but they had also been shooting at each during the war, so there was no love lost. I spent a lot of time talking with Alija Izetbegović, who was the great wartime hero of the Bosniaks, and with Kresimir Zubak, two of the three co-presidents under the Dayton constitution. Zubak who was a timid, lawyerly soul who kept his head down and didn't take risks. Izetbegović, by contrast, was a calculating politician and a very angry man, because of what had happened to his people, the Bosnian Muslims. From the outset, I did a lot of traveling around the country. I went down to Mostar a lot, because that's the heartland of the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I worked regularly with Carl Bildt, the former Swedish boy wonder prime minister who was the first High Representative under the Dayton Accords. The Office of the High Representative, or OHR, was established at Dayton as the international community overseer of the peace process. The governor general if you will. He's not a UN official - the BBC still makes this mistake and calls him the UN High Representative. The UN, I can't overstress this, failed badly in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nobody - not the Serbs, not the Croats, not the Bosniaks - has much good to say about the UN to this day.

Q: Well, while we're on it, let's talk a bit about the UN. What was the analysis? Was it, just UN apparatus or the people or what?

BEECROFT: It was largely the assumptions. I've already described the NATO end of this when we were talking about NATO. The UN was given the lead, and treated Bosnia as a Chapter Six operation. You have Chapter Six operations and, much more rarely, Chapter Seven. Chapter Six is peacekeeping. Chapter Seven is peacemaking. For reasons having to do with Russian opposition - because of the Serb angle, European timidity and, I have to say, American disinterest - this was made a Chapter Six operation by the Security Council. The fiction was maintained, between 1992 and the end of 1995, when the UN threw in the towel, that Bosnia was a "benign environment." Amazingly that's the terminology that was used. UN tanks were painted white. A number of nice young men and women from the Netherlands and Spain and Italy and France and Germany who found themselves chained to fences outside of weapon storage sites by Serb soldiers. Tanks turned around if an old woman decided to sit down in the middle of the road, which of course they did regularly. In a word, you had a kind of fecklessness, which is very well reflected in some of the movies that have been made about Bosnia since then, one in particular called No Man's Land that won a best foreign film Oscar several years ago. If you have a chance to see it, it's terrific. Eventually, it all came to a head at Srebrenica, and the Dutch totally lost it. That travesty, followed by the second shelling of the market in Sarajevo, convinced President Clinton to press NATO to intervene. It was the CNN factor that did it.

Q: Did you have the feeling that it was finally the United States saying enough is enough as opposed to the rest of Europe saying enough is enough?

BEECROFT: Yes, it was the U.S. I have no doubt. I just don't think there was an end to the Europeans' fecklessness.

Q: This is something I think is very important as we talk about the problems of the United States today where we seem to have kind of lost our way, but you know, the phrase, the United States is an indispensable country keeps coming back as I look at this. So many actions would not have been taken, sometimes bad actions, but for the most part somebody saying enough is enough, knock it off fellows and stopping things.

BEECROFT: I think that's certainly what happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To this day, if there's one thing that Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs agree about, it's that they don't want the Americans to leave. SFOR is being phased out. It will be gone in another month. It's being replaced by a European force called EUFOR that will still have a kind of dotted-line relationship with NATO, but there will be no Americans in EUFOR. This is not bringing a lot of joy to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Q: Now, are the British at that time were they sort of seen as surrogates or not or were they part of the problem.

BEECROFT: They were seen as part of Europe. Remember, too, that the British had command of UNPROFOR, and the Bosnians took note. President Clinton, Secretary Christopher and Dick Holbrooke drove the international community, including the Russians, to agreement at Dayton. As a sop to the Europeans, the Dayton Accords were signed a month later in Paris, in December '95. The French still insist on calling them the Dayton-Paris Accords. That's what I found in the summer of '96 - you had this very heavy NATO force. It was NATO-plus even then. It included Russians, Swedes...

Q: Moroccans?

BEECROFT: That's right.

Q: Ukrainians.

BEECROFT: Yes. In fact, I used to ride around in Ukrainian helicopters, and survived to tell about it. It was obviously a NATO operation, plus friends, and of course the friends loved it. They all got NATO training, and they got to use the PXs. For them, it was an eye-opener, because this was the first time that they had worked with NATO, and they liked it - especially because the Americans were in charge. All the commanders of SFOR, and IFOR before it, were Americans from the get-go.

Q: In the first place you were an American representing America, I mean this was where did you fit?

BEECROFT: Yes. That was funny. My office was in the Chancery, which had been on the ground for about a year at that point; before that, it had been "exiled" to Vienna. Until a few months before my arrival, most of the staff slept on the floor or behind their desks. There was a large sandbag-walled bomb shelter downstairs. My office was a broom closet, but at least it had a window. It was located between the Ambassador's office and the men's room, it was a person's room. It was a great way to get to know the staff; they all had to pass my desk on the way to the loo. The embassy building is an old house, sort of a Tito-modern Bauhaus style with no particular architectural merit, at the bottom of an orchard-covered hill. That always worried the RSO, because it would have been easy to lob grenades onto the roof.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

BEECROFT: A marvelous man named John Menzies. He was a USIA officer, the second U.S. Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first had been Vic Jackovich, who opened the embassy in Vienna in 1994. John replaced Vic. He retired from the Foreign Service after Sarajevo, and is now president of a small college in Iowa. He'd be an interesting person for you to talk with. John was a decent as they come. There was no question of competition between him and me. I made it clear from the start that I wasn't there to either look over his shoulder or second-guess him. I had a very narrow mandate and I was going to stick to it. I said "I've been a DCM twice, but you already have a DCM. I'll stay out of your way and do my job, and I'll keep you informed. If I can help you in anyway, just tell me." That's the way we worked it, and it worked fine. One of my first tasks was to work with Carl Bildt to arrange the first meeting of the three presidents of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Q: Now, Carl Bildt's position was what?

BEECROFT: He was the first High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina. OHR, the Office of the High Representative, was established under Annex 10 of the Dayton Accords. The High Representative reports to a sort of international community steering committee called the Peace Implementation Council or PIC - not to NATO, not to the OSCE, certainly not to the United Nations. This group meets every three months or so, usually at the political director level. Its members are the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Russia, Turkey - which also represents the Organization of the Islamic Conference - and Japan, which writes checks. Anyway, Carl Bildt was basically writing the script as he went. There was no job description for High Representative. Annex 10 of the Dayton Accords says, pretty much in so many words, the High Representative is the final authority in theater for everything he's responsible for. Really loose definition. The words "in theater" had been heavily fought over at Dayton. The PIC capitals were not about to relinquish final authority. Well, Bildt, as a former prime minister, knew very well that capitals weren't paying day-to-day attention to events on the ground as long as there was no immediate crisis. As time went on, the Office of the High Representative has acquired more and more authority. Bildt's successor, a Spaniard with the wonderful name of Carlos Westendorp, was granted the so-called the Bonn powers by the PIC. The Bonn Powers allow the High Representative to remove people from office for cause and to impose legislation. Every High Representative since Bildt has started out by saying he would use these powers sparingly, and ended up throwing lightning bolts all over the place. The Bonn Powers changed the paradigm. They're the way, in my view, to get your way in a post-conflict situation, and if you've got the muscle to prevail.

I worked with Bildt in two main areas. First of all, I ran something that the United States had started, called the Federation Forum. This was a way to get the two sides, the Croat and the Bosniak sides of the Federation to work better together. Once a month or so, I would chair these meetings with the support of the Deputy High Representative, Bildt's deputy, either in Sarajevo or in Mostar. We would talk through current issues and try to get the Federation authorities to begin to see themselves as part of a single enterprise. There would also be a representative there from what was then IFOR and later became SFOR. Under the Dayton Accords, under the constitution, there are three presidents. It's a co-presidency, collective presidency. But they had never met together. They all knew each other well, because they'd all been in the old Bosnia and Herzegovina parliament together under Tito. High Rep Bildt and I succeeded in bringing them together for a face-to-face meeting in the fall of '96. It was like pulling teeth. We got them to meet in a hotel called the Saraj, as in Sarajevo, overlooking the city. They finally agreed to meet, but only if the meeting wouldn't be seen as official. They just nickel-and-dime you to death, but they did meet and that broke the ice.

Q: Why weren't they meeting?

BEECROFT: They distrusted each other. They'd all been on opposite sides during the war. They all felt that they had a lot to answer for, and they were right. The Serb president, Krajisnik, has been convicted by the court in The Hague. The Croat president, Zubak, is still involved in politics, but his role and influence are minimal. Izetbegovi? died last year. Bosniaks consider him a martyr who saved them from extermination during the war. This meeting at the Hotel Saraj was incredible. They were all using the second singular form of the verthe "tu" form. That's how well they knew each other. I remember once being up in Pale, a former ski resort town above Sarajevo, near where the men's and women's downhill races were held at the 1984 Olympics. I'm talking to Krajisnik, and I ask him, "How can you possibly do business with the other two members of the presidency if you never talk to them?" He says, "Never talk to them, eh? Watch this." He takes out his cell phone and dials: "Alija,, how are you? How's the family? Haven't seen you in a long time." It went on like this for about 10 minutes. He was talking with Izetbegovi?; it was not a bluff. "Hope to see you soon, all the best, give my best to the wife. Bye bye." Then he looks at me and says, "See, I can talk to him any time I want."

Q: He just picked up a cell phone?

BEECROFT: Yes. I mean it was breathtaking.

Q: Well, in the first place when you got there how did you look at the different groups? Let's take the Bosniaks first. I have the impression that although they're called Muslims that they were very far from being Muslims in a way. I mean they had really nothing to do with what we would consider Muslims or Islamists today.

BEECROFT: Absolutely. They take great pains to make it clear to you that they are Europeans first and foremost. We're talking about South Slavs here; "Yugo" means "south." Whether they're Croat Serbs or Bosniaks, they're all South Slavs. That was one of the problems that arose when we began using DNA to identify body parts discovered in mass graves. There was a hope that maybe we could identify them as Bosniaks, Croats or Serbs by their DNA. Forget it. What is different is their religion and their history, and the two are intimately linked. Many of the Bosniaks were city people when the Ottomans arrived in the 15th century. The Ottomans were not only clever, but realized that they didn't have the numbers to occupy all positions of responsibility. They said to the mayors or local authorities, "We would like you to stay in place and keep on doing what you're doing. Only one little thing: you must convert to Islam. If you don't convert, you're welcome to stay on, but you will find that your taxes will rise and life won't be as comfortable. Needless to say, many of the elite converted. You're absolutely right; before 1991, it was really Islam light. In fact, it was two degrees removed from what we would call the Islam of Mecca. First it was Turkish Islam, not Arabic Islam. Second, these were Europeans. A lot of them did not go to the mosque regularly. There was a lot of intermarriage in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and nobody seemed to care very much. So when I hear these clichés about hundreds of years of enmity, it's just not so. The Bosniaks always say "We're the most European of any of them."

They also see themselves as being the aggrieved party. And it's true that they suffered the most. The current High Representative, Lord Ashdown, in his autobiography, describes a dinner in 1995 where he sat next to Franjo Tudjman, the president of Croatia. Tudjman was drunk. Ashdown asked him, "Is it true, Mr. President, that you and Milosević agreed on how to partition Bosnia and Herzegovina?" Tudjman said, "Yes, and I'll show you how." So he draws this map of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is basically triangular shape, with a sort of yin and yang S curve across it and Sarajevo right on the line. Then Tudjman says to Ashdown, "Everything to the west was going to go to me and everything to the east was going to go to Milosević." Ashdown asked, "What about Sarajevo?" He said, "Well, our plan was to divide that and build a wall." Now, the Berlin Wall had fallen only seven years earlier. The consequence here would have been to build a new wall and create a Muslim ghetto in Sarajevo, which obviously would have been the prelude to either expulsion or something worse. This, after all, is the war where the horrible term of "ethnic cleansing" was born. There's nothing clean about ethnic cleansing.

Q: How did you view the Croats at this time?

BEECROFT: At that time and in one word, as whiners. They are the smallest of Bosnia's three constituent peoples more than 15%. Theoretically, I think the Croats have the best potential to move away from the horror of the war and toward Europe. It's important to make a distinction between Croats and Croatians, just as one makes a distinction in the region between Serbs and Serbians. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, you have Croats. They are citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, not citizens of Croatia, although a heck of a lot of them carry two passports. Likewise, Serbians are citizens of Serbia, but there are lots of Serbs in Bosnia. The Bosnian Croats are in something of a privileged situation. First of all, as I said, a lot of them have two passports, both Bosnian and Croatian. Second of all, they have a huge and prosperous mafia, so there was a lot of money pouring in, including during the war. Third, the influence of the Catholic Church is huge - and I'm talking about very hardline elements of the Catholic Church, especially in Herzegovina down near the Croatian border. One of the difficult situations that we internationals all faced was how to deal with the Bishop of Mostar, Branko Perić, who is close to being a fascist. I went to the Vatican twice and met with the Foreign Minister of the Holy See to discuss this problem. You have - and this is true of all three ethnic groups - a kind of an unholy alliance between ethnic political parties, ethnic mafias and religious organizations. These people have an investment in not seeking reconciliation. That's why it has taken so long to get where we are now in Bosnia and Herzegovina, because they've got a lot invested in not reconciling with the other groups.

Q: Well, then what were we able while you were there from '76 to when?

BEECROFT: I was there from '96.

Q: I mean '96.

BEECROFT: Just about a year the first time, August '96 to August '97, and then I went back in 2001.

Q: Okay. During '96 to '97, could you see progress?

BEECROFT: I guess the short answer is not nearly as much as we would have liked, because nobody understood at the outset what a tough nut this was going to be. Bosnia and Herzegovina, geographically and historically - along with Kosovo for different reasons - is kind of a linchpin of the Balkans. If things succeed in Bosnia, they can succeed anywhere in the region. If things fail in Bosnia, the region will know it and there will be repercussions. Why? Because you have these overlaps across the borders. Serbia is mainly made up of Serbs, but not only. Croatia is mainly Croats, especially since the war, but not only. Bosnia is all of the above. It's Croats, it's Serbs, it's Muslims. It's also Jews, Roma, Romanians, Hungarians, Ukrainians, and Italians, who were brought in by the Austro-Hungarians. It's a real hodgepodge. It's also geographically very difficult. I like to say it's West Virginia with much higher mountains. So you also have this fragmentation and separation caused by geography - deep valleys, little villages, occasional big towns, a couple of major cities. The entire population in 1991 was only four million, and with the war it's now probably about two thirds of that. There were two million refugees and IDPs out of four million people, of whom one million have come back to settle their property claims. Many of them have stayed on, but Bosnia and Herzegovina lost one quarter of the population at least.

Q: Where did you find sort of the most cooperation and the least cooperation?

BEECROFT: Very hard to predict. The Bosniaks were the cleverest in at least appearing to cooperate. The Serbs were in a "not only no, but hell no" mode for the most part, with one exception and I'll come back to that. The Croats were still angling for ways to get out of the bargain completely and become part of Croatia, which was not going to happen, but you had the HDZ, the Croatian Democratic Party, which is anything but democratic, and was closely aligned with the Croat mafia and the church in pushing for separation, on the grounds that because the Croat population of Bosnia and Herzegovina was the smallest of the three main groups, it was going to be squeezed out by the other two. The Bosniak population was about 45% of the total, the Serbs about 30% and the Croats about 15%. As I said, the Bosniaks would talk a good line, but remember that after the fighting stopped there were still a number of former and maybe some active Mujaheddin in Bosnia and Herzegovina who had come in during the war. So, when you asked me before about Islam in the country, there was this second group, who were not Bosniaks but Arabs, maybe as many as 1,500 or 2,000, some of whom had married local women and had settled into mountain villages. They were basically being protected by Izetbegović and the people around him in the SDA, the Bosniak hardline party. On instructions from Washington, I called on Izetbegović repeatedly to request that he expel these people. He always deflected the matter, and would tell me quite bluntly that he felt he had a blood debt to them, because they had helped protect and preserve Bosnia during the war.

Q: These were Islamists from other, from Islamic countries who had come to fight for the Bosniak cause?

BEECROFT: Yes. Correct. They were Moroccans, Jordanians, Egyptians, Algerians - the list was fairly long and some of them had fought in Afghanistan, so they were no slouches. That began to worry the U.S. Government and we put a lot of pressure on Izetbegovi?, especially after Khobar Towers and the like. Obviously after 9/11, the interest grew exponentially. By that time, though, Izetbegovi? was no longer in day-to-day control, and many Mujaheddin had been expelled. There are probably fewer than 100 left in Bosnia and Herzegovina today and they are carefully watched.

Q: What about I mean what was Bildt doing? Did he have control of the troops or who?

BEECROFT: No. Bildt had a staff of maybe 40 or 50 people internationals and some locals. He had a small group of mainly Swedish Foreign Ministry people around him, but he didn't have control of anything, including funds. He was defining his job as he went along, and given the fact that he didn't have the Bonn powers, that was a pretty good trick. He did quite well, all things considered. IFOR/SFOR was commanded at that time by a three-star American general, later reduced to two stars, now one star. The current one is the last. After him, SFOR command will be turned over to the European Union. One of the things we defined along the way was where the powers of the High Representative stopped and the powers of the NATO commander started. Bildt's job was to try to give life to the constitutional structure agreed at Dayton. COMIFOR's job was to, and this is a quote, "maintain a safe and secure environment." That was the mission of IFOR/SFOR. In other words, to give Bildt and his successors an environment in which they could build a functioning state. As time went on - and it took a couple of years - there began to be more and more understanding of where these lines were. It was all defined on the fly, but on the basis of Dayton.

Then you had another player. Here's another area where the UN actually did some good. They created an international police task force, IPTF, bringing in police from the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and also bringing in people like Italian Carabinieri, armed paramilitary police who bridged the gap between what SFOR did and what Bildt was doing. Meanwhile, as the biggest kid on the block, our Embassy was very active in keeping tabs on all this reporting back to Washington. In November of '96, John Menzies left Sarajevo. From that time until when I left in August 1997, I wore two hats. I was both Head of Mission and Special Envoy. My wife was in Washington the whole time.

Q: Well, I mean were you when you say head of mission, does this mean chief of mission?

BEECROFT: Yes. I had a DCM, for example.

Q: So, you were the ambassador?

BEECROFT: I was never confirmed. Remember, this was the beginning of Clinton's second term, so there were the usual political maneuverings going on. EUR supported me for the ambassadorship, but higher levels had another candidate. So it goes.

Q: While you were there there were zones where different militaries of war came to stay.

BEECROFT: Correct.

Q: What about this inability to get a hold of what's his name Karadi? and all, I mean during the time you were there.

BEECROFT: Yes, we knew where Karadi? was. It was one of the great lost opportunities. I mentioned this town of Pale, which was basically a resort community 25 minutes up the road from Sarajevo proper, in a high mountain valley. Karadi? had an office there, in a factory that had been used to assemble Mercedes trucks called the Famos factory. You mentioned the fact that there were different military districts. Unlike Sarajevo, which was commanded by a U.S. General, Pale was in the area of responsibility of the French, the Spanish and the Italians. They sent patrols through Pale on a regular basis. We knew his car, though - it was a Mercedes with tinted windows. We knew where his family lived and we knew where his office was. The French and the Italians never moved to pick him up.

Q: How did we analyze this? What was the motivation of lack of enterprise in this matter?

BEECROFT: I can only tell you what the speculation was - that they were taking orders from their capitals on this matter, not from NATO in Brussels. I think that's true. For reasons having to do with not wanting to get any of their soldiers killed, and maybe other more political reasons as well, they gave him a pass.

Q: Was this a matter of concern, annoyance, anger?

BEECROFT: It was a matter of great annoyance and anger in Washington, but there was little we could do about it at the Embassy. I don't doubt that Washington was applying pressure in the capitals concerned, but nothing ever happened on the ground. Here's a quick anecdote. The president of Republika Srpska, a woman named Biljana Plavsi?, is now in a minimum security prison in Sweden. She was one tough, smart lady - a former professor in Sarajevo, and certainly no angel. During the war, one of her bodyguards was Arkan, who was one of the most vicious Serb terrorists. One day, she asked me to come up and talk to her. So I went up the hill to Pale in our armored van, and we pull into the parking lot of the Famos factory, where she had her office, and we see his car there. Of course I was under strict instructions to steer clear of this guy. This was not a matter for civilians to deal with. So I said to my RS protocol escort, "Of course you understand that there are circumstances under which I cannot enter that building." She's thinking, you could see the wheels turning. Then she says, "Oh, just a minute please." She goes into the building and comes out five minutes later with a big smile on her face, and says, "I can assure you there is no one in that building whom you would not wish to meet" They'd chased him out the back door. Meanwhile I was asking myself, what if I meet him in the men's room?

Q: I'm making a citizen's arrest.

BEECROFT: That's right. I mean, it really isn't a laughing matter, it's tragicomic.

Q: It really is. Well, while you were there were you seeing the beginnings of what you might call reconciliation or getting used to each other, particularly the kids, the younger people and all?

BEECROFT: No.

Q: I mean were the churches and everybody still pounding the drums?

BEECROFT: No, there was very little active propagandizing in that sense. We at the Embassy were beginning to work with the Council of Europe and NGO's like the Center for Civic Education, which were trying to build a viable education system. There were three different systems, and the textbooks in each were calling the other two peoples inferior human beings, that kind of thing. We also worked hard to establish an Inter-Religious Council, consisting of the senior religious leaders of the Islamic, the Orthodox, Serb, Croat and the Jewish faith the Raï½s ul-Ulema, the Vladika, the Cardinal and the head of the Jewish community. In the summer of '97, we finally succeeded in getting the four of them to meet together. I remember thinking, What a bunch of old farts. There was no warmth at all. They deigned to be in the same room but there was very little spirit of compromise. With the exception of the Mufti, who is a very clever man, and the head of the Jewish community, whom I greatly respect, one felt very little in terms of reconciliation in the air that day.

Incidentally, the Jewish community plays a very special role in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They arrived after the expulsion from Spain in 1492. Some of them still speak some Ladino, the Romance equivalent of Yiddish in the Iberian peninsula. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, they found themselves in a place where there's always been a certain amount of polarization, so they took on a unique role as middlemen. Whenever you wanted anything done that could be ethnically difficult, you'd enlist the services of a member of the Jewish community. The head of the Sarajevo Jewish community is Jacob Finzi, a delightful man with relatives in Chicago. He currently leads the Civil Service Commission, because that's is where the plum jobs get handed out and the three main ethnic groups concurred that they couldn't entrust it to one of their own. This is quite typical.

Anyway, reconciliation was definitely not in the air. Remember, that the first post-war election was held in September 1996, only a half year really after the shooting stopped. They were organized by the OSCE Mission, which then proceeded to oversee six elections in six years. The 1996 elections were pronounced free and fair, but the Bosnian patient nearly died. Why? Because the rule of law wasn't in place. People need to have confidence in the future if they're to vote for change. But daily life was still too uncertain in September 1996. Unless people have confidence in the rule of a democratic, responsive police, a fair and efficient court system, functioning prison they will circle the wagons and vote for the hardliners. That's what they did. Too bad no one checked with us about this before going into Iraq.

Q: What about corruption? I recall some headlines about money going to the government in Bosnia and corrupt as all hell.

BEECROFT: Yes, it's still true. The international community been applying considerable pressure to deal with corruption. At the OSCE Mission, we had our own team of a half dozen auditors. They focused on publicly owned corporations such as the electric companies, which in many cases are socialist relics. Corruption is built into the system. It's very Mediterranean in that sense. The attitude is this: if you work for a public company, or for the government, you're entitled to skim some cream off the top. The war just made matters worse. There is political corruption, but the whole economy is also based on corruption. People claimed there were no jobs. The fact is that there were, but they belonged to the gray economy. It wasn't full employment, but it wasn't 40% or 50% unemployment either. People were working for somebody's brother or nephew or somebody in the family, and they weren't paying taxes. Have you ever heard of Arizona Market?

Q: Yes, but you might explain what it is.

BEECROFT: Okay. Brčko is a river port city across the Sava River from Croatia, way up north. The highway that leads south out of Brčko toward Tuzla was named Arizona Highway by SFOR. In 1996, south of Brčko, right on the boundary line between the two entities, an ad hoc market sprang up. It looked for all the world like a souk, a Middle Eastern bazaar. The three ethnic mafias cleaned out a minefield and installed wooden walkways and lean-to shacks. It was something you'd expect to see outside of Istanbul. You could buy anything at Arizona Market. You could buy a television. You could buy a nice young lady from Moldova. You could buy a Mercedes stolen off the streets of Berlin yesterday - name your color. It was all there. Everybody profited. These guys all knew each other, all understood each other and they cut the pie very efficiently.

Q: It shows there is such a thing as real cooperation.

BEECROFT: You bet, as long as it's in everybody's interests.

Q: Did you get involved in the when you were there, at one point I think everybody depending on which entity you were in you had license plates of that entity.

BEECROFT: Not ethnicity.

Q: Were you there when they switched the license plates? Explain what the problem was.

BEECROFT: During and immediately after the war, the Bosniak, Croat and Serb authorities each issued their own license plates. Naturally, this discouraged people from leaving their own territories, because they were so easily identifiable. I have a Serb license plate at home. Someone gave it to me when I left in '04. It has SS on it - it looks like CC because it's in Cyrillic - which stood for "Serb Sarajevo." There was also a Bosniak license plate whose emblem was a fleur de lys, because that was the Bosniak symbol. And you had a Croat license plate, which featured a red and white checkerboard, the Croat symbol. Of course, these competing license plates carried ethnic and religious connotations. You didn't want to drive into the "wrong" territory, depending on the license plate you had. Very early on, we began to push for a single license plate and a single currency, because you also had three currencies. The politicians' interest was in exploiting and reinforcing everything possible to add to their power base, which meant exaggerating all differences. The high representative's office, Carl Bildt, began coming up with designs for license plates and designs for currency. Oh, and by the way, designs for a Bosnia and Herzegovina flag.

Q: Oh God.

BEECROFT: There was no state-level flag. There was a Republic of Srpska flag with a Serb crest on it and the slogan "SSSS" in Cyrillic, CCCC-which is an abbreviation for "only unity saves the Serbs." There was no Federation flag, because the Croats and the Bosniaks couldn't agree on one. One of the first breakthroughs we achieved in the so-called Federation Forum was agreement on a Federation flag - red vertical line down one side, green vertical side down the other side, a shield in the middle with the EU stars at the bottom, to show that the Federation is be part of Europe, and at the top of the crest a Bosniak fleur de lys alongside a Croat checkerboard.

But at this point, 1996-'97, there was still no flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, we were pressing for a single license plate and a single currency. This is not easy, because you are dealing with symbols, and if there is one thing that matters in the Balkans, it's symbolism. I have at a sample banknote at home that Krajisnik tabled one day at a presidents 'meeting; the Serbs had had it printed in Paris. It's high-quality work, really nice. It features a really nice picture of a Serbian Orthodox monastery. At this president's meeting, Izetbegovi?, the Bosniak president, looks over and says, "I know that monastery. Isn't it in Serbia?" Krajisnik, looking a bit like the kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar, replies, "Yes, but that shouldn't make any difference since it's a monastery, not a public building." So Izetbegovi? gets a little smile on his face and says, "We don't care what's on the bills, as long as it's noncontroversial. I'd be perfectly happy with trees and birds and flowers." Eventually, the three sides agreed on a series of faces of academics and other non-political figures.

As for the license plates, Bildt and the British Ambassador, Charles Crawford, devised a totally anodyne plate consisting of three numbers, one letter and three numbers, with no national markings at all. His idea was that that would build confidence that anyone could drive anywhere without being identified as a Bosniak, Croat or Serb. He took it up to Pale and showed it to Krajisnik, who shakes his head and says, "Oh, this is unacceptable. You're going to be using letters that do not exist in the Cyrillic alphabet." So Bildt announces: "Mr. President, I have good news for you. We have chosen only the 12 letters that are common between the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets." According to Crawford, Krajisnik flushed bright red and said, "We will still never accept it." That was the kind of psychological trench warfare that was being waged. The symbols were used as tools to emphasize small differences and keep political control.

The same thing with the flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The flag was invented out of whole cloth by Carl Bildt and his team. It consists of a blue field to suggest Europe, on which is a white triangle in the general shape of Bosnia and Herzegovina and a line of stars which have no particular significance.. It looks like something you could pull out of a cereal box.

Q: It really is an abomination.

BEECROFT: As I said, it was just something that OHR came up with. Bildt actually had a half dozen designs he was considering, This one was anodyne enough so that the Bosnians eventually accepted it. But if you go to Banja Luka, the seat of government of the Republika Srpska, today you will be hard pressed to find a Bosnian flag. There are plenty of RS flags on display, though. They have put the Bosnian flag in the RS parliament chamber, though, along with the RS flag. That surprised a lot of people, including me.

Q: Did you have problems with corruption creeping into the American presence there, the military and civilian?

BEECROFT: Virtually none. I'm deeply proud of what the United States has done there over the years, in terms of the level and seriousness of the commitment - SFOR troops, staffers at OHR and OSCE, police in the International Police Task Force, people in various NGO's...I don't think we could have asked for more.

Q: How did you find, not just American, but the NGO community, non-government organization community. What was their contribution and what was your impression of their work?

BEECROFT: They were especially active in five areas: health; humanitarian demining; housing rehabilitation; refugee return, which is related; and education. Bosnia and Herzegovina, after all, had been a constituent republic of Yugoslavia, with a very good standard of health care, excellent hospitals in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Mostar, Banja Luka, Gorazde, other cities. During the war, a lot of dedicated doctors, Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs, others stayed on, and many died. A lot of NGOs were active, such as CARE, who came in and helped to re-start the hospital system. Then there was humanitarian demining. Estimates for land mines still in the ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina today vary between 500,000 and a million. The various militaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina had planted some of the minefields, so there were some records as to where some of them were, but others had been planted by peasant farmers who managed to get access to weapons storage sites. They wanted to discourage people from taking over their farms if they were forced off the land. So you had these random land mines scattered here and there. Today, animals, and sometimes children or adults, are still being killed by these incidental mines. No one had the money or the resources necessary to take all these mines out of the ground - either the random mines or the minefields that had been planted by the military along the confrontation line. A number of NGOs with expertise in demining came in and began getting to work, training locals to do it. Some war veterans who were looking for work anyway were hired on. It was a drop in the bucket, but it was a start. As for refugees, Save the Children, Red Cross, Red Crescent, UNHCR, lots of organizations focused on refugee issues. UNHCR is not an NGO, but they helped launch and organize the process. This ties directly to reconstruction, facilitating the return of people who want to come back and finding places for them to live. The U.S. Embassy in the early days, OSCE later on, really got involved along with UNHCR in creating circumstances for return. This has been one of the good news stories in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It will never be what it was before, but the advocates of "ethnic cleansing" never fully accomplished their mission either.

Q: You know, I was in is it Derventa.

BEECROFT: Derventa. When were you there?

Q: '94, I think it was the third election.

BEECROFT: Oh my God. So you saw it when it was really in bad shape.

Q: Yes. People would point out houses. These were Muslim houses essentially that had been blown up.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: Were you able to I mean were they getting Muslims back into places like that?

BEECROFT: Not a whole lot in Derventa, because Derventa is still terribly poor. A lot of it has to do with lack of jobs. People need to be able to come back and do something. The eastern part of Republika Srpska, along the Drina, had been overwhelmingly Muslim. That is, after all, where Srebrenica is. The region was viciously "cleansed" of Muslims by the Serbs. If you go back today to places like Foča or Visegrad, the Muslims have come back in large numbers. Foča is a town right on the border with Montenegro, not too far from where Karadžić reportedly is holed up. The Mayor of Foča, a Serb, deserves a lot of credit. Mosques have been rebuilt. Muslims have come back. In the spring of '04, I was at a town called Janja, near Bijeljina, to visit a school there. Before the war, Janja had been 48% Muslim and 52% Serb. By 1998, it was 99% Serb. Now many Muslims have returned, and the school was a wonder. Here were people of both nationalities on the ground, faculty, parents and students, and they were working together very smoothly. They had developed a curriculum that both be comfortable with. The lesson is if there's some sense of law and order, and if there is some sense of comfort with each other, you can begin the reconciliation process on your own.

Q: It sounds like in a way the reconciliation really does come down to on the ground rather than in the capital where the political leaders are still mouthing the same old crap.

BEECROFT: Absolutely right. There are bright lights all over Bosnia and Herzegovina and that to me is the great hope.

Q: What about Brčko is that a problem for you when you were there?

BEECROFT: In '96 and '97 it was awful. Br?ko, a river port and market town up on the Sava River, was viciously ethnically cleansed of Bosniaks in 1992-3. Terrible things were done in those days. This was in the very first days of "ethnic cleansing." At Dayton, Br?ko was so sensitive, both geographically and socially, that when the accords were agreed in November of '95, they couldn't agree on Br?ko - the reason being that it's located right at the narrowest place in the saddlebags that are the Republika Srpska. Br?ko is at the top of the saddle. So, the RS was not about to give it up for strategic reasons, even though it had been mainly Bosniak. On the other hand, the Federation wanted it because it was also where the north-south lines of communication go; rail and road bridges cross the Sava into Croatia and then on to Hungary. Both entities wanted it but neither could have it. After three years of prolonged negotiations, the Br?ko District was established in 1998 under the authority of the High Representative - like the District of Columbia, except it isn't the capital. Ever since, there have been Br?ko Administrators, always Americans, who report directly to the High Rep. Ten years ago, it was a shambles, surrounded by minefields. It was largely rubble. Mosques and churches in the town had been flattened. There was no economy. The bridge across the Sava River to Croatia had been blown. There were no hotels; you couldn't stay there. We put in a series of senior FSOs as the Br?ko Administrators.

Q: I interviewed one.

BEECROFT: Bill Farrand, probably.

Q: Bill Farrand, yes.

BEECROFT: Yes, Bill was the first. I can't tell you as much as he can, but he was magnificent, and so were his successors. They used their powers as the Deputy to the High Representative to reform the political and economic structure of Br?ko. They turned the town into a laboratory. It was the first town in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the schools were integrated forcibly. It was the first place where they held elections that were really elections, where the old hardline parties didn't just buy the process or try to dominate it. They created an effective police force. Right at the edge of town was a major SFOR base, Camp McGovern, built right on the inter-entity boundary line. U.S. and NATO troops kept a close watch. Over time, Br?ko, because of its strategic location and thanks to the process of putting enlightened local citizens in charge, has become a very most prosperous town, second only to Sarajevo. It irritates both the RS and the Federation, because Br?ko is making money hand over the fist. Taxes are lower, import duties are lower, and neither entity can put its hand in the pot. They both covet it and they can't have it. Br?ko has turned from a disaster into a success story.

Q: How about Mostar when you were the first time?

BEECROFT: Actually, the first time was as a tourist in 1974, with my wife Mette and then six-year-old son Christopher. To come back and see what had happened to it was shocking. There's a grand avenue, called the Bulevar, that parallels the river on the west side of town. The buildings along it looked like Swiss cheese. You had the Croats on the west side of the street and the Bosniaks on the east side, firing at point blank range for the better part of three years, every caliber of weapon. It looked like pictures of Stalingrad in 1943. The bridge of course was gone, the famous Turkish bridge over the river. The shelling had been such that even when you were a few blocks away from the boulevard, the buildings were pretty badly beaten up. No one was talking to anybody. You would go to east Mostar, the Muslim side of town, and you'd talk to the Bosniak mayor. Then you'd go to west Mostar and you'd talk to the Croat mayor. You had, in effect, two estranged halves of a single city. Mostar has recovered from that only very slowly. No one could solve it quickly. The international community threw a series of special envoys at Mostar, and they've all come a-cropper. One of them, the former mayor of Bremen, Hans Koschnick came close to being ridden out of town on a rail. As he left town in his car would be the better word - he was pelted with bricks and rocks. Finally, Paddy Ashdown last year threw in the gauntlet and said "I've had enough." He imposed a solution on Mostar. At the end of the war, what you had was a central district, which was a political no man's land. Then you had three Bosniak communities on the east side of the Neretva River and three Croat communities on the west side. There were two universities, two police forces, two mafias, two religious organizations - the Islamic community on the east side and the Catholic community on the west side, which was in turn divided between Franciscans and non-Franciscans. A lot of competition there, in a very small place.

Q: I know in World War II the Franciscans were as close to being a fascist organization as you can have. I mean the little brothers of St. Francis were taking Serbs, putting them in churches and setting them on fire.

BEECROFT: Yes. Well, they haven't changed much in Mostar. There are really two completely separate Franciscan organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. If you go to middle Bosnia, high up in the mountains, the Franciscans are great. I've stayed at monasteries. The warm welcome you get, the genuine hospitality is fantastic. But those Franciscans aren't on speaking terms with the Franciscans down in Herzegovina. They literally don't talk to each other. The Franciscans of Mostar are making a mint out of pilgrimages to the shrine of Medjugorje, which the Vatican has never recognized.

Q: Were the pilgrims going in all the time when you were there?

BEECROFT: Oh, absolutely, all during the war and they still do. I have met people from the United States and Canada who have never been to Europe other than to go to Medjugorje

Q: Well, such is faith I guess.

BEECROFT: If you love kitsch, Medjugorje is the place to go. Other than in Jerusalem, I've never seen such horrible stuff, but it's a great moneymaker. Anyway, Mostar is only very slowly coming back. The bridge is back in its glory, although it looks too clean. It will take time to get dirty again. There is now one political structure for the entire city, but it's more appearance than reality. One thing that I find encouraging is that non-Bosniaks, non-Croats are coming back to Mostar. Several thousand Serbs have returned. That's good. I've been to the ruins of the Serb Orthodox cathedral, was also flattened. That's what needs to be done - mix it up. Don't let things get polarized again.

Q: Did you sort of in the late night hours sit around, like why was Mostar so bad? Was anybody able to?

BEECROFT: We know what happened. Why it happened is harder to explain. What happened in the early days of the war was that the Serbs attacked Mostar from the east from the areas that they occupied around Trebinje in the eastern RS. The Bosniaks and Croats united to repel them successfully. This was 1993. Very soon after their victory over the Serbs, the Bosniak and Croat troops turned their guns on each other, starting in the barracks along the Neretva where they had been stationed, they turned their guns on each other. No one is sure why, but I've always suspected that it was on orders from Tudjman.

Q: One last question, what about the area whose name escapes me now, but where the Croats drove the Serbs out up near.

BEECROFT: Krajina.

Q: Krajina, what was happening up there?

BEECROFT: Krajina is in Croatia, but we got involved with it in my second incarnation in Bosnia, because we were trying to get the Krajina Serbs, who were now refugees in the Republika Srpska, to go back.

Q: Well, we'll pick that up the next time.

BEECROFT: Okay.

Q: So, we'll pick this up, you left in '97 and where did you go?

BEECROFT: August '97 and I went to the Senior Seminar.

Q: Okay and we'll pick it up at that point.

BEECROFT: Okay.

Q: Today is the 1st of December, 2004. Bob, looking at a picture of the Pope here. I don't think you mentioned the Pope's visit. How did that go and what was that about?

BEECROFT: The Pope came to Sarajevo in April 1997. It was tied to the efforts to begin the reconciliation process, because so much of what had gone wrong in Bosnia and Herzegovina was colored by religion. The Pope had been very active during the war in trying to stop the fighting, trying to foster reconciliation. So he came to Sarajevo, a year and four months after the fighting stopped. He had made a promise to do so, and he wanted to keep it. So he flew to Sarajevo - interesting that he didn't go to Mostar; in fact, he has never gone to Mostar. He came again in 2002 and he went to Banja Luka, the seat of the RS government. He understood that in Bosnia, not all the minefields are in the ground. Anyway, it was a very cold April morning, with snow squalls. Rumors were circulating that a bomb was planted under a bridge on the route that he was taking in from the airport the former Sniper Alley. SFOR troops were all over the place. Buses came from all over the country, the first time anyone had seen something like that since the fighting stopped. Catholics came in large numbers, of course, but a lot of Muslims as well. There were fewer Serbs, but some were present too. The Sarajevo soccer stadium was full, 60,000 people. The Pope talked of reconciliation and got enormous cheers. It was really cold, and we wondered about his health, but he was tough. I have to stress: this was not just a Catholic rally. It was a message to all Bosnians, and they welcomed it. Just like the political leaders, the religious leaders were hardly on speaking terms at the end of the war. It took another few months, but in July or August of 1997, we got Cardinal Pulji?; the Grand Mufti, Mustafa ?eri? - a very smart man, former head of the Islamic community in Chicago-; the Serb Orthodox Vladika, Vasilije Ka?avenda; and the head of the Jewish community, Jacob Finzi, together in one room at the Hotel Bosna. It was the first time that had happened since the fighting started. What you see there with the Pope....

Q: We're looking at a picture here.

BEECROFT: That was the impetus that led to the establishment of the inter-religious council. I have to tell you, it's been a bumpy road ever since. They're still very suspicious of each other. It's not just theology. In fact I'd say theology is the least of it. It has to do with things like property claims, relative power and influence. The Vladika, for example, never stops talking about the property that was seized from the Orthodox Church by Tito at the end of World War II, and which they're still trying to get back. It's hard to locate the deeds. It's social, it's historic, everyone has a grief to tell you about. Everyone's a victim. Everyone claims to be a victim.

Q: This is when you get to the Balkans. This is the name of the game. They've been brought up to be victims.

BEECROFT: Yes and they will do whatever they can to get you to buy into their psychology of being the victim, which means everybody else is the exploiter. As an outsider, you have to make it very clear very early on that you're not going to play that game. The only way I found to do that is to say yes, we realize you all had a difficult past, but let's talk about the future. That's when you get the blank looks.

Q: Yes, well, now, speaking of the Pope was either on your part or anybody else's part, was there a saying say do something about the fascist bishop of Mostar or take the little brothers of St. Francis and get them out of. I mean they are practically an offshoot of the old Ustashi who were the fascist police of the Croatia republic during the Hitler time.

BEECROFT: Correct. The bishop of Mostar was quoted on the radio within the past year - although he has made it very hard to get a copy of the transcript - saying that things weren't all that bad under the Ustashi Fascist Croat Republic.

Q: If you were Catholic things were pretty damn good.

BEECROFT: They were indeed.

Q: _____ and all.

BEECROFT: That's right.

Q: Anyway, but I mean, was there any attempt to get the Pope to put a reign on these forces or not?

BEECROFT: Well, I went to the Vatican twice. I went in '02 and I went again this past March in '04. I met each time with the Foreign Minister of the Holy See. It was clear to me that they know they have a problem but they're unsure how to deal with it. They point out that these hardliners are very careful to stay on the right side of the line theologically, so it's hard to lay a hand on them. Frankly I think that they feel that they have bigger fish to fry, and bigger problems in places like Boston or some parts of Latin America.

Q: Sure and also as I know having served in Belgrade, the virulent Croat Catholics are very strong particularly in Chicago, but also in Cleveland and sort of the Midwest cities.

BEECROFT: The Croat Diaspora is the strongest of the three. The Bosniak diaspora is not well organized. You find Bosniaks in the United States, in Canada, all over Western Europe, but in today's atmosphere many don't like to advertise that they're Muslims. The Serbs are in a category all their own, passive-aggressive, with an enormous collective chip on their shoulders. All three approach the issues differently. I don't want to overplay the Croat part, it's just that the Croats, as the smallest of the three constituent peoples, are the most vocal about the situation they found themselves in at the end of the war. It's another reason why one of the issues that I advocated was the need for a new census. The Croats didn't like at all, because they'd lost the greatest share of population. There hasn't been a census in Bosnia Herzegovina since 1991. That means that the Dayton Accords, and everything that has followed from them, are based on a fiction, because the population today doesn't look like it did in 1991. It's smaller and it's distributed differently, and that's not going to change a whole lot. It seems to me that you can't really talk about the future of Bosnia until you know who's where and in what numbers. That's why a census is so necessary.

Q: Okay, well, then in '97 was it, you went to the senior seminar?

BEECROFT: Right.

Q: How did you find the senior seminar?

BEECROFT: Well, you can imagine the contrast - leaving Sarajevo in August and a couple of weeks later registering at FSI. Sadly, the Senior Seminar now has to be referred to in the past tense. My colleagues were people in late mid-career, who in some cases already had ambassadorships or would soon, plus their equivalents from CIA and the military - senior colonels who were anticipating their first star. Anyway, these were people who had a good deal of experience and were used to operating independently and being under a whole lot of pressure. All of a sudden you're given a year in which you are told, "This is your year. It's not a vacation." We may nudge you in one direction or another and we have certain expectations, but it's your year to make the best of you can. Go do it." So there we were, 31 souls. We had a great time. This was a wonderful group of people. We bonded very quickly. There was an Air Force colonel who knew the number to call when we needed transportation. We started out the year with a trip to Alaska, and was that ever a great bonding experience. From Sarajevo in August to Juneau in September - wow.

Q: Did you find yourself, were there any particular sort of lessons insights or something that you came away from it with?

BEECROFT: Well, one of the main points of the year or, in addition to serving as a launch platform for what you were going to do next, was to have a chance to appreciate your own country the way you had come to know other people's countries. That was the philosophy behind it: to rediscover America at this stage in your life and career, and to really get to know whom you're representing. That was the great adventure. As I said, we flew to Alaska. We started out down in the panhandle, in the capital, Juneau. We met with the governor and the lieutenant governor. We met with the Russian Orthodox Bishop; the Orthodox Church is still strong, especially around Sitka. We flew up to the North Slope. We flew out to an island between Alaska and Siberia, inhabited by 5,000 Native Americans who are very prosperous. They have an exemption that allows them to whale. They have a very nice school. They're doing very well. We were amazed to learn that every man, woman and child who lives in Alaska not only doesn't pay taxes, but gets paid to live there. It comes from the oil revenues.

We spent a couple of days in Anchorage, which is a very nice town. The Alaska trip was a great start, because we had a chance to discover an America we didn't know and put it in the context of the America we did know. For example, we discovered, talking to the governor, that when Alaskans talk about Washington, they're not talking about D.C.; they're talking about Seattle. They talk about "the lower 48" as a different place entirely. They have their own foreign policy - links with Siberia, South Korea, Japan. When Alaskans send these very strong characters off to Washington as senators, it's intentional. They are semi-ambassadors. It's a very different view of what it means to be an American than we have here in Washington. Anyway, that was the first of a number of interesting trips.

A month later I was driving a harvester on a farm in Indiana. That winter, we went to Clarksdale, Mississippi, the poorest county in the United States, and visited a catfish farm. We also went to New Orleans and to Florida, talked with Cuban-Americans in Miami. We also met with a lot of people here in Washington. We met at the Supreme Court with Justice Scalia. We spent a week getting to know the gay and lesbian community. This was new for most of us, especially for our military colleagues.

Q: How did you, did you go to a place for that?

BEECROFT: First a panel from the community came to us. Then we went to Adams-Morgan to meet with them and it was really a great dialogue, an eye-opener. Here's a subculture which is very much an economic power these days, and a political power too.

Another Senior Seminar tradition is to give you a whole month to do something on your own. I went to L.A. and spent a month as an intern at the Center for Civic Education, an organization I had gotten to know in Bosnia. You may have heard of Civitas, that's their international arm. When I was in Bosnia the first time, they were trying to get the schools up and running again, and to get civic education included in the curriculum. American volunteer teachers in Bosnia, doing wonderful work. As I mentioned to you, education reform became one of my major priorities when I went back to Bosnia as head of the OSCE mission, but these American teachers were my inspiration, going to schools all over the country and working with local teachers on the rule of law, the importance of a constitution, how you have to start with the kids to if you want to have committed members of civil society, who know what their rights and duties are. So I spent February 1998 at the Center for Civic Education's headquarters in Calabasas, California, on the northern edge of L.A. near Malibu, one mountain range back from the ocean. It turned out that the Bosnian Federation's Education Minister was coming for a visit to the center so I hosted that visit and did a lot of work in helping prepare for the next group of American teachers that were going out to Bosnia. That was great. I was away from Washington, away from thinking like a bureaucrat, working with real people on real problems, and also got a taste of what it's like to try and keep the funding coming to organizations like that because they've always passing the hat.

Then, at the end of April, I was pulled out of the Senior Seminar prematurely. Eric Newsom, the Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, asked if I was interested in being his Principal Deputy. So I left the Senior Seminar a few weeks before the end of the academic year, but I came back in June to graduate with the class. There I was, back in the mausoleum of Foggy Bottom as of the summer of '98, as PDAS in PM, the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs.

Q: PDAS means principal deputy assistant secretary.

BEECROFT: Right.

Q: You did that from what '98 to?

BEECROFT: 2000, two years.

Q: What were the issues that you were dealing with, major issues?

BEECROFT: There were two principal sets of issues. One of them was export controls. The U.S. congress pays a lot of attention to that - what weapons is the United States exporting to other countries, and under what restrictions? There are complex legal issues involved, and the Hill plays a lot of attention. Companies like Boeing and Lockheed- Martin export weapons technology and systems in large quantities. So they keep close tabs on State Department arms export policy and procedures. We look carefully at the potential impact in terms of the regional and local military balance, and also how these sales are financed. The bureau of political military affairs has the responsibility. We work all the time with the Pentagon, which tends to act as the chief sales agent, so you're under a lot of pressure from DOD to hurry up with these export licenses. We like to get it right, because if we don't, the Hill comes at you from another direction.

Q: What were our concerns you say if you don't get it right, the Hill will get after you. What are you talking about?

BEECROFT: Well, we're concerned about weapons potentially ending up in the wrong hands, and potentially in terrorists' hands. Corrupt sales practices are a related concern. There is a very strict set of regulations called ITAthe International Traffic in Arms Regulations. If weapons go to a state which does not have good internal controls, the potential for trouble is obvious. Pakistan is a good example. It's a complex relationship. We want Pakistan to survive and prosper, but we and Congress had serious problems, for example, with A. Q. Khan's illegal nuclear technology export network. The U.S. had also agreed to sell Pakistan F-16s in the 1980s, but President Bush '41 blocked the sale in 1990. We had running debates on those F-16s the whole time I was in PM. President Bush '43 finally released them for transfer in 2005.

I was also very active in humanitarian demining. PM has the lead on landmine policy issues in the State Department, and in the U.S. Government overall. Now, this was a year or so after the Ottawa Treaty had been signed. The Clinton Administration didn't sign it, and we were getting heavy criticism from some quarters in Congress, not to mention NGOs and the European press. But we had strong reasons not to sign it. The Ottawa Treaty was loaded against us. To this day, it has never taken a single landmine out of the ground. The U.S. is by far the largest contributor to demining operations in the world. I always felt that I had no apologies to make on that score.

Q: Well, let's go into this issue. What was the treaty about and why do we feel we couldn't sign it? Could you give some examples of it?

BEECROFT: Yes. There are two kinds of landmines - anti-personnel mines and anti-tank mines. The Ottawa Treaty is an anti-personnel landmine treaty. An anti-tank mine is designed so that if you walk on it it's not going to explode. For it to explode, something big and heavy has to go over it. The United States has been the world leader in developing anti-tank mines that self-destruct, they deactivate automatically after a set period. Our anti-tank mines become inoperable after a certain period, and this is certainly true for our anti-personnel mines as well. We are the only country that can make that statement, so in a very real way we are already ahead of the Ottawa Treaty. But, we're talking about the realities of the world, something the drafters of Ottawa chose to dismiss. For us, this is about Korea. You have a North Korean army of a couple million soldiers. Seoul is 35 miles south of the border. U.S. Army and the South Korean Army depend on landmines as a deterrent. Our anti-tank mines are surrounded by anti-personnel mines, to discourage people from trying to go in and turn off the anti-tank mines. Now, the Ottawa Treaty requires that if you put satellite anti-personnel mines around an anti-tank mine, they have to be physically connected by wires to the anti-tank mine. Ours are not; they're linked by radio, which is every bit as effective. So on this point, Ottawa is a red herring. It isn't how they're connected that's the question; it's how effective and controllable they are. Ours are very controllable - and they also deactivate after a given period.

Q: After so many?

BEECROFT: After a few weeks. You can adjust the time they're activated - dial the time like an alarm clock. But we could not get the negotiators to agree to this in Oslo. The Treaty was negotiated in Oslo, not Ottawa.

Q: Why?

BEECROFT: Because they had their agenda and we had ours. Their agenda was driven mainly by NGOs, non-governmental organizations, that tended to be anti-American. Sorry, but that's the fact. They didn't like the fact that we were the 800-pound gorilla. Now, we're talking about Bill Clinton's Washington now, not George W. Bush's, so one would have thought that there might have been a little more understanding. No way. It was a "we're from Venus and you're from Mars" attitude. Now, I should add that a lot of this has changed since the late '90's, when the Ottawa Treaty was drafted. Now the U.S. works very closely with demining NGOs. We at the Embassy worked with them in Bosnia, but at the outset there was a real cultural disconnect. Unfortunately, it influenced the negotiations and our negotiators simply were not about to yield on this. Most of the countries that signed the Ottawa Treaty don't have to think about the North Korean army. This is where I tend to feel very American. This just was frankly none of their business at Ottawa. They made it their business, and they got it wrong. In the meantime the United States continues to put a good deal of money into taking mines out of the ground. I don't think the Ottawa Treaty has ever taken a mine out of the ground, but it sure makes the signatories feel good.

Q: Well, did you find yourself trying to deal with, particularly Canadians seem to be, is this the way of the Canadians sticking it to the United States?

BEECROFT: Yes, there was some of that, at least with certain Canadian government officials and NGOs. They had a holier-than-thou attitude. The person I worked most closely with in the Canadian Foreign Ministry was pleasant enough, but her attitude was closer to that of the NGOs than of a serious partner in taking mines out of the ground. I gather that has changed somewhat, too, but it sure was the case then.

Q: Were you getting pressure from Congress on this sort of thing?

BEECROFT: We were getting pressure not to change our position. There was very little in the way of pressure to sign Ottawa, and if there had been I would have pushed back. That was not a problem. I think there was a congressman or congresswoman I guess from San Francisco, but not many.

Q: Then were there any other issues that you were involved in?

BEECROFT: Oh yes. Another issue that I spent a lot of time on was POLAD political advisors to major military commands, and at the Pentagon. I began my Foreign Service career, as you may recall, as deputy POLAD to SACEUR. I've always had a high regard for the work the political advisors do for military commanders. I have never met a senior military commander who didn't appreciate having a POLAD. By the time I got to PM in '98 - this was at the end of that period, just before our Embassies were bombed in Africa, when we were still in the glow of the end of the Cold War - the attitude in many quarters of Washington was that military issues no longer mattered very much. You remember, "It's the economy, stupid." That attitude was still pervasive in Washington in '98, even though we now had large numbers of troops in the Balkans. It was hard to get people's attention. Because the military had itself suffered from this attitude, we were having trouble recruiting really good political advisors, POLADs. I took this one on, and began recruiting and advertising and making sure that POLAD jobs were seen as promotable. Frankly, they hadn't been. They were seen as end-of-the-road jobs. We worked with the Director General, revised the promotion precepts. Just a few weeks ago, I went to a retirement ceremony for a friend who later took on the POLAD development and recruitment program in PM, and he made a point of praising these efforts because recruitment has improved and now there are POLADS at all the major commands, and in places where we never would have dreamt of placing them before.

Q: I have a friend who is a POLAD in Djibouti.

BEECROFT: Yes, that's a big job.

Q: I mean she's a retired ambassador to Somalia, I mean to Djibouti itself.

BEECROFT: Who's that?

Q: Lange Schermerhorn.

BEECROFT: Oh, she's a good friend.

Q: Yes, Lange and I served, she was vice consul when I was consul general in Saigon.

BEECROFT: Yes, that's right.

Q: But, I mean it shows you the reach of this.

BEECROFT: Absolutely, I mean the program is healthy as never before, because people realize as never before that jointness doesn't stop with people in uniforms. Jointness now means that the civilian and military components have to work together and understand each other better.

Q: Well, I think you're in this business, but as I look at how things have developed, I think that the Foreign Service and the professional military see things much more alike than they used to.

BEECROFT: I agree.

Q: I think Iraq, our present mess in Iraq shows this. I mean it was pushed not by, it was essentially opposed by both the professional military and the professional Foreign Service.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: The way it was done. Then they came and are coming out of saying this is a mess.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: It does show a major change. It used to be that there were two different cultures that didn't see alike.

BEECROFT: Yes and that has changed utterly. I see it here in this National War College Class of 2005. I was in the Class of '88 here, and the cultures were on either side of the great divide. Now there is a melding. People don't have to spend so much time explaining themselves to each other. That was really necessary in 1988. Reviving the POLAD program is one of the things I spent the most time on and proudest of having done in PM.

Q: Who was the head of PM?

BEECROFT: It was Eric Newsom, who was Schedule C.

Q: Which means a political appointee.

BEECROFT: Political appointee, but very knowledgeable in political-military affairs.

Q: Where did he come from?

BEECROFT: I'd known Eric first in the Carter era, when he and I were in PM together. He was Schedule C then, too. He spent a lot of time on the Hill. I believe he's now in the private sector. He had a fantastic command of pol-mil issues. There were also some very good people working under him, like Turk Maggi, a retired U.S. Army helicopter pilot who is now PM's expert on export control issues - sounds tedious, but can be political dynamite. Pam Frazier was another PM stalwart, now at the Pentagon. John Finney, who just retired a few weeks ago and became Mr. POLAD after I left. We actually opened a two-person office to focus only on POLAD affairs.

Q: Now, you were there basically at the end of the Clinton administration. The Clinton administration came in with say "that's the economy stupid," also there were reports that a lot of the White House aids disrespected the military uniform and that sort of thing.

BEECROFT: They're not reports, they're facts.

Q: By the time you got there did you sense there was a change?

BEECROFT: Yes, and I can point to two real-world developments that brought that about. The first was the embassy bombings.

Q: These were in Nairobi.

BEECROFT: In Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. The second was the Cole.

Q: Yes, that was the bombing of the.

BEECROFT: U.S.S. Cole.

Q: Cole a destroyer off the port of Aden.

BEECROFT: The Port of Aden, that's right. There were other things, too. First of all Madeline Albright was different from Warren Christopher. You may remember the famous question that she asked in the early '90s, when she was still UN Ambassador, at a meeting that Colin Powell attended in his role as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. She asked him, "Well, why do we have this wonderful military if you don't wish to use it?" This reflected a steady change in attitude in the course of the Clinton years. Once Bush came in, and especially after 9/11, it changed from an evolution to a revolution.

Q: But you felt that when you got onboard that the political military role was, I mean was on the upswing as opposed to an administration that was inward looking?

BEECROFT: Yes. Things had bottomed out and were beginning to turn around. What happened in the Balkans played a key role in that. Another factor was the disaster of Blackhawk Down.

Q: In Somalia.

BEECROFT: In Somalia in '93. The relationship between Bill Clinton and the Joint Chiefs and the military generally was always a vexed one. That remained the case right to the end. I found a certain reluctance on the part of the military to commit to him because they weren't totally comfortable with him as a leader.

Q: Did you find, coming out you know the people who came out of Vietnam, all carried some baggage with them and I mean they're still in power today. I mean they're still around as witnessed our last election, but also many other people. Did you find a similar sort of particularly in the political military field within the State Department sort of a Balkan experience, people coming out and saying well, this worked, this didn't work, I'll never do that again or not?

BEECROFT: There was a debate going on throughout this whole period on the question of whether real men do peacekeeping. Some of this came out of Vietnam. You remember the hearts and minds discussions, and the CORDS program. I think there was certainly a sour taste that came out of Vietnam about nation-building. You may remember that Condi Rice made herself very clear on nation-building in an article she wrote in 2000. It was a popular argument inside the U.S. military at the time - "Let the Canadians and Swedes do the nation-building. We're the 800-pound gorilla." That's all well and good, but then we discovered that the things we thought we were going to be doing in 2000 aren't the things we're doing in 2004, because you've got to know who your enemy is. Your enemy is not a state. We talked about the empire of evil, but in the context of three states: Iraq, Iran and North Korea. If you read the Bush national security strategy of 2002, which theoretically is still in force, every time it mentions insurgence and rogue elements it does so in the context of support by states. Now what we see is that the terrorists are independent actors who may or may not be supported by states overtly. There may be covert support, there probably is, but it isn't a one-to-one thing. It's like trying to punch a bowl of jello. Who's the enemy? How do you define the threat? This is what we're doing a lot of talking about here at the National War College this year. What was your question?

Q: No, no, I was asking whether there was a sort of a Bosnian ethos that came out.

BEECROFT: Okay, yes, because this was the next step. The U.S. went into Bosnia and Herzegovina in the winter of 1995-96. We went in not as part of a UN force, but as part of a NATO-led force in which we were by far the preponderant element. 28,000 Americans out of a total of 60,000. The last Americans are just leaving, even as we speak, eight years later. Eight years later. Bosnia was a success. How long are we going to be there in cases of failure? Either a lot longer or a lot shorter. I think the Balkan experience, or at least the Bosnian experience, helped write the end to what started in Vietnam, because we began to learn that first of all, there were going to be times when we would be doing things that real men don't like to do, but real men, and real women, had better do them anyway. You won't be surprised that I'm going to be co-teaching an elective this winter with a USAID colleague on failed states and peacekeeping.

There was a lot of theology on peace operations in the 1990s. We had peacekeeping. We had peacemaking. We had peace enforcement. And we had the general rubric of peace operations. This is too theological by half, but what we did find out was that when the military go in, they need clear rules of engagement. They need strong leadership which understands civilian concerns - that's why the reservists have done very well in Bosnia - and they need to know what the military's relationship is to the other elements of power. Who is legally entitled to use force in a country? This is basic to any stable society, any successful state. Sovereignty entails a monopoly on the use of force by somebody. Who is that? Hopefully not someone in a military uniform. How does the military relate to the police? How reliable and honest are the courts and the penal system? We spent a lot of time in Bosnia and Herzegovina, debating these questions and working this through. I can tell you that in '97, the general in command of SFOR not only did not want to deal with local police, he didn't want to deal with UN-backed International Police Task Force either. "SFOR is not here to do police work" was his mantra. By the time I got back to Sarajevo in 2001, they were working together hand in glove, because it was obvious that the only way to get the military out was to build a locally run system that could responsibly use force when and as required. So by 2001, you had the UN International Police Task Force working closely with the NATO military to build and train a local police force. That's key to state-building.

Q: I just interviewed as part of an Iraq project a man who was working in the Balkans and in Macedonia and in Bosnia as an experienced police officer. Then he went to Iraq and found that the disconnect started all over again.

BEECROFT: Yes, absolutely.

Q: I mean he was trying to build up an Iraqi police force and had a lieutenant colonel that was telling him what to do except the lieutenant colonel didn't know anything about police.

BEECROFT: Well, we're just not very good at learning from experience. In the Iraqi case, there was actually a mindset against anything that was seen as coming out of the Clinton years. That meant that the lessons learned in Bosnia and Herzegovina were glossed over or ignored.

Q: Is there anything else we should discuss?

BEECROFT: On PM? Well, you know, one of the things that really encouraged me was that there are an awful lot of people in the functional bureaus at State, GS, contract - who know a hell of a lot and aren't always given their due. IO is one that come to mind.

Q: That's International Organizations.

BEECROFT: Right. DRL is another Democracy, Human Rights and Labor..

Q: Drugs and?

BEECROFT: Yes, it's called drugs and thugs.

Q: Drugs and thugs.

BEECROFT: They're major players because there are plenty of drugs and plenty of thugs. DRL has been very much involved in terrorism issues. PM has risen and fallen, but there has always been a tug of war between PM and RPM. RPM is the NATO affairs office in EUR. RPM stands for Regional Political-Military. I go back far enough so that I remember when every geographic bureau had an RPM or something like it. NEA, for example, had one because there was a thing called CENT the Central Treaty Organization. EAP had one when it was still EA, because there was a regional security organization called SEATO. We had these NATO clones in the Middle East and Southeast Asia which have since disappeared. But EUR/RPM still exists, and there were times when it was practically a stand-alone bureau back in the halcyon days of NATO's dominance. That's not true any more, but RPM still has a role to play. In addition to NATO, RPM also covers the OSCE, so I dealt with them quite a bit from Sarajevo. There's been this internal tug of war over the years between PM and RPM, which I think PM has now won. It took about forty years. Maybe some of it is that NATO has lost ground since the end of the cold war. Another thing that really strikes me is how many people in PM know a lot about money and the congressional budget process, because funding has a big bearing on a number of PM's responsibilities, whether it has to do with export controls, or with things like the accounts that PM uses for arm sales and arms transfers. A lot of those are on the basis of low-cost, or sometimes no-cost, loans. Funding of weapons sales is quite a Byzantine process that goes through PM after a lot of consulting with Congress. These are often highly preferential sales. I had not realized just how active the relationship is between some elements of PM and the Hill in terms of convincing the right staffers on the right committees to agree to a sale, which would then, at least in part, come out of the taxpayer's pocket.

Q: To the advantage of an arms supplier.

BEECROFT: You bet. The F-16s were a good example.

Q: Oh, yes.

BEECROFT: Those F-16s sat for over a decade, waiting for consent from Congress for Pakistan to pick them up.

Q: Did you ever run across the C-130s for Libya?

BEECROFT: Not on my watch, but they were legendary inside PM.

Q: They'd been around for.

BEECROFT: Since Qadhafi came in.

Q: Yes.

BEECROFT: They may still be waiting. They'd have to be totally rewired now.

Q: Well, then where did you go, in 2000?

BEECROFT: The summer of 2000. Frankly, I had not lost my fascination with Balkan affairs, and at this point EUR asked me if I wanted to become the Senior Advisor for Bosnian Affairs. There were still about a lot of people doing Balkans issues, in an office called EUR/SCE, South Central Europe. I said yes. I couldn't resist. Frankly I had a bee in my bonnet about getting back to the Balkans. This was four and a half years after Dayton had come into force, and it was still very much a central issue. There was no certainty about whether Bosnia was going to succeed. No one knew what was going to happen, whether there'd be another Balkan war. You'll recall that NATO had conducted a bombing campaign against Serbia in '99, after Milosevi? attempted to "cleanse" Kosovo of its overwhelmingly Albanian population.

Q: This was Kosovo?

BEECROFT: Yes. We had a UN-led force in Kosovo by 2000.

Q: I've interviewed Bill Walker.

BEECROFT: Okay, so you've got it from the inside then. In the summer of 2000 I left PM and went back to EUR and picked up the Bosnia account. This was not a classic Bosnia desk. It was bigger than that. There were still probably 50 or 60 people in this office dealing with all aspects of the Balkans.

Q: You say the Balkans, you're talking about Bosnia, does that include Kosovo, too or not?

BEECROFT: Different people had different accounts. You may know some of the names - Jim Pardew, who is now ambassador in Sofia, for one. Jim came over from DoD as a colonel, worked on Bosnia in the early days, successfully drove the Train and Equip program, and eventually became Ambassador to Bulgaria. A no-nonsense, cut-to-the-chase straight shooter. Jim worked very closely with the Secretary. There was Jim O'Brien, a State Department lawyer who actually helped write the Dayton Accords. He wrote the Bosnian constitution, which is still in force. He's now with Albright Associates. One of smartest, calmest, kindest people around unlike many people at State, he knew how to listen. Who else? Jim Dobbins. Jim was Special Adviser to the President and Secretary of State for the Balkans in the late '90's, then became Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. Very experienced, analytical, a cool customer. Dobbins is now at RAND, and he has published some brilliant articles on lessons learned in the Balkans. He was here at the National War College as a speaker just 10 days ago and wowed everybody.

Q: I've interviewed Jim.

BEECROFT: Yes. So I spent the next year traveling back and forth to Sarajevo elsewhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina, participated in some conferences in Croatia and Serbia, and tried to keep the momentum going. I mean we still had lots of problems with the relationship between the two entities. The economy was a disaster, basically no outside investment - who is going to invest in a country that could fall apart again? There were still three separate armed forces, a recipe for instability, and that was one of the things I worked very hard on, trying to find ways to begin to bridge the gap among the various militaries. We didn't get very far. Tom Miller was our Ambassador, very much a Holbrooke man. He's now our ambassador in Athens. Aggressive, take-no-prisoners style, actually fit the situation quite well. Tom worked with his British counterpart to put together a coalition, for the 2000 elections, a so-called moderate coalition. I say so-called because frankly they weren't all that moderate.

Q: Nothing's moderate.

BEECROFT: No. But at least you didn't have the hardliners pulling the strings. So, all of these things were on the agenda throughout that year, 2000-'01. There was still no end in sight. In the summer of '01, Jim Pardew asked me whether I'd like to go back to Bosnia as a confirmed ambassador and head the OSCE mission. It would be an unaccompanied tour, so my wife Mette and I talked and agreed I should do it. I went out to Sarajevo in the summer of 2001, then came back to Washington in November for my confirmation hearings.

Q: Let's still while you were on the, had the Balkan watch.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: You were there when the Bush II administration came in?

BEECROFT: That's right. '00 to '01.

Q: Did you feel any change because of, after all the Bush administration wasn't going to do nation building. That seemed to be one of the mantras and its sort of ironic, but staying away from a lot of foreign affairs and that sort of thing. Did you pick up that attitude? Was that there or you were sort of left on your own?

BEECROFT: It may seem strange, but that didn't really hit us. I think the new administration's attitude was "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." We were seen as keeping things quiet in a place that still needed work, and where they didn't want things to get any worse. We weren't in the spotlight, and that was fine. Bush wasn't inaugurated until January, and I stayed on into the summer of 2001 -six or seven months. After 9/11, the focus wasn't on us at all. There was an assumption, which was later borne out, that eventually this rather large establishment, the South Central Europe office and the Bosnia Working Group, would be closed down, but frankly that would have happened whether it was a Gore or a Bush administration. Things were going in that direction, but the SCE staff was still in the double-digit numbers when I left.

Q: Was the experience still pretty positive of the people there, particularly the military and the Foreign Service?

BEECROFT: You mean in Bosnia?

Q: Yes.

BEECROFT: I think it was. One of the things that happened that turned out to very positive, I alluded to it before, was the substitution of Reservists and National Guardsmen and women for the active military. Of course, after 9/11 that really picked up. It turned out that Reservists and National Guardsmen because they are a bit older and have day jobs in the civilian world, bring a lot more practical expertise to situations that have a civilian aspect to it than the standing military, the active military can do. To give you one example, the U.S. had a major presence at a former Yugoslav air force base outside of Tuzla. The first National Guard unit that went in, sometime in the fall of '01, was from the Texas National Guard. It turned out that the deputy commander was a full colonel from Dallas, who was in his day job the director of the Dallas public works system. He took it on himself to fix the city of Tuzla sewer system in his spare time. Now, if you've ever been in Tuzla, you know there's a problem. The city sits on top of a warren of abandoned coal mines. The city is sinking, and as it does, the rising water table is messing up the sewers. This colonel went to work on this, probably for the first time ever because Tito didn't do public works very well either. When he was done, new pumps had been installed, all the drainage pipes cleaned out, and the Tuzla sewage system and the pumping system were working. It was a tremendously successful public relations effort, not just for SFOR, but for the United States in particular. It also was a message that the military can do for you besides killing people and breaking things. This is the really good side of state-building. No one should step in and say, this isn't your mission. The mission is defined by the needs.

Q: Well, then you, when did, you were still waiting for confirmation when 9/11 happened.

BEECROFT: I was already in Sarajevo, heading the OSCE Mission, but not yet with the formal title.

Q: How did that hit your bureau? Did everybody see this, what did this mean?

BEECROFT: Much less than I would have thought. I was in an airplane from Vienna when 9/11 happened, circling over Brussels airport. The practice had been for the PIC Steering Board - the Peace Implementation Council at the political director level - to meet in Brussels every few months. When we landed and entered the terminal, it was obvious something serious had happened, because the place was very heavily patrolled and everyone was glued to the TV screens. That was where I first saw the towers burning. By the time we got to the hotel in central Brussels, the question was whether the meeting would even go ahead. It did, the next day, but the participants were in a state of semi-shock. I then flew back to Sarajevo. I have to say that in the post-9/11 period, U.S. policy on the Balkans has remained, I think, quite well managed. Obviously its place on the list of priorities and concerns went way down, but fortunately it was a time when the beginnings of a viable state structure were beginning to be seen in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The question Washington asked was, How can we maintain and if possible accelerate the transition? I have to give Washington credit for not abandoning the Balkans - just saying, okay, we've got other fish to fry, have a nice day. We didn't do that. The U.S. military stayed there, as COMSFOR went from three stars to two stars to one star, and now we're going to be leaving. The NGOs had already left - NGOs are like goldfish, they go where the food is, and Bosnia had stopped being interesting. More and more, our mantra has been that Bosnia and Herzegovina is part of Europe. It is eventually something that the Europeans will have to resolve, even if they failed in the early 1990s. And the U.S. will not be totally absent, I'm convinced of that.

Q: Well, then you went there as chief of mission to the OSCE?

BEECROFT: I was head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Q: With the rank of ambassador?

BEECROFT: Correct.

Q: You were there from when to when?

BEECROFT: I was there from July 2001 until July 2004.

Q: When you got there, well, what was the situation when you got there?

BEECROFT: Well, all of the major players were still there, and they were there in force. SFOR had gone down from 60,000 at its peak, of whom 28,000 were Americans, to a force of 20,000 of whom 10,000 were Americans. As I've said, the UN discredited itself in the eyes of Bosnians of all stripes in the '90s, so it was there only in very specific, limited functions. The UNHCR handled refugee issues. The UNDP did development, but so did a lot of other players. The UNIPTF did police training, although it later handed that off to the European Union. The UNHCHR acted as a human rights watchdog, but so did the OSCE Mission on a much larger scale. Naturally, the Office of the High Representative, OHR, which is not a UN organization, was and remains the lead international presence. Dayton Annex 10 designates OHR as "the final authority in theater."

Q: Who is the OHR?

BEECROFT: There have been four high representatives since the OHR was established in December of 1995. Carl Bildt, a former Swedish prime minister, was the first. The second was Carlos Westendorp, a Spaniard of Dutch parentage who has just become the Spanish Ambassador to Washington. The third was Wolfgang Petritsch, an Austrian of Slovenian parentage who had some understanding of the region; he is now the Austrian Ambassador to the UN offices in Geneva. The fourth took over the job in June 2002: Lord Paddy Ashdown, former British army commando officer in Malaysia, former head of the British Liberal Democratic Party, close to Tony Blair. A Northern Irishman, he understands this kind of political environment. As far as I'm concerned I've got a lot of company in this Paddy is hands down the best of the four.

Q: Now, when you got there, what was the OSCE doing?

BEECROFT: The OSCE Mission was doing several things that it had not been doing when it set up shop at the end of '95. Its mandate and mission have evolved. First of all, it's the largest OSCE Mission anywhere. As an organization, the OSCE has 19 missions, from the Balkans to central Asia. When I got there, the Bosnia Mission numbered over 800 people. It's now down to about 700, and two-thirds of its employees now are Bosnians. The OSCE is actually one of three international organizations with specific mandates in the Dayton Accords, the other two being OHR and NATO. The Mission's original mandate was to organize and manage elections. Between September '96 and the election of 2002, we organized six elections, each of which was very successful. Unfortunately it was sort of "the operation was successful, but the patient died, because the hardliners kept getting re-elected."

Q: The wrong people won.

BEECROFT: And that's an important lesson learned about the importance of stability and confidence in the rule of law. Elections alone won't solve your problem. Before she'll take a chance on the future and vote for change, Granny has to have confidence that she can walk down to the corner store and buy a loaf of bread without being robbed or shot at. If you don't have that, you don't have enough. By the time I got there in 2001, the Mission knew that we were down to one election before handing off election responsibilities to the Bosnian Central Election Commission, which is now up and running and is doing fine. A second thing we did, and are still doing, is refugee returns. The OSCE Mission had, and still has, the largest international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Four regional centers and 24, now 22, field offices, in addition to our headquarters in Sarajevo. We covered the territory better than any other civilian agency. When it came to refugee returns, I'm tempted to say we wrote the book. UNHCR obviously had a major role because it does this kind of work all over the world. We worked hand and glove with them, but we had the bodies on the ground, they didn't. We had the lawyers, they didn't. The lawyers in our Department of Human Rights realized that if you want people to come home, you don't do it by making property claims a matter for the courts. If you do that, things get hung up, especially with a judiciary that is both incompetent and corrupt. You may never get your property back that way. Instead, we developed administrative offices around the country who had the property registers and the cadastres going back to pre-1992, pre-war. We were able to keep a close eye on these offices. They were manned by Bosnian citizens, but their sole job was to identify property ownership, and then work with the local police to kick out squatters or find family they could move in with. You don't rate sympathy just because you are living in a house that belongs to somebody else. Of course this was a particular problem in the former Yugoslavia, where there was this concept of what's called "socially owned property." That means that if you worked for the government, or for a state-owned company, you got a flat, you got an apartment and you also got a pretty strong claim to keeping it, even if you stopped working for that company. We had to decide really delicate questions of ownership - if you lived in a socially owned flat that was allocated to you by the socialist enterprise you worked for, is that the same thing as owning it? More often than not, the decision was yes because it's as close as you could come to private property in a socialist system. The OSCE Mission's lawyers wrote the property laws in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There'd never been property laws in a western sense before. All in all, refugee return was a big deal and has been a big success.

Q: Well, tell me, I go back to my time looking at Derventa, when I saw flat piles of houses they said, oh, that belongs to a Muslim. This is my Serb guide. They were the ones that had Muslim claimed Bosniak claimants they were just gone flat.

BEECROFT: Oh, it went beyond that. I know that area. There are still a lot of flattened houses there. You could tell by looking at it whether a house had been blown up by a projectile coming from outside or landmine placed inside. If somebody had planted a mine - and this was quite common - the house would implode it would fall in on itself. If a house had been hit by, say, an anti-tank missile, it would explode, fragment. Out of the two million-odd refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one million have returned and claimed their properties. In some cases, yes, all they found was rubble. In many cases, they'd work out exchange deals. In some cases, they found a house they would have to rehabilitate. Not all of them are ever going to come back. This is a country that lost a quarter of its population, but ironically compared with a lot of the rest of the world, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a success story. Some Bosnians thought of the war as a great cause. Most of them thought it was a disaster. In a case like this, there's only so much the international community can do, and I think this is one lesson we should never forget: Keep it practical. Don't feel guilty if you can't re-create the status quo ante. You didn't start it. You just have to do your best to fix it. Now we have a million returnees, a million people out of four million who have claimed their properties. By the way, most of them came back on their own, so-called spontaneous returns, after the year 2000. Why then? That's when the rule of law began to take hold. The returnees had security. There have been very few cases of Muslim houses torched or Serbs shot at in a Bosniak area. It isn't just Bosniaks that have come back, it's Serbs and Croats as well.

Q: How about the Serbs in Krajina?

BEECROFT: What you've got there is a cross-border problem, Croatia vs. Bosnia, that is exacerbated by the fact that Croatia would like to pretend it's not part of the Balkans at all. They argue: "We're Catholics, we're Western, we're going to be in Europe soon, we're going to be in NATO soon. We are not a Balkan country." Well, it doesn't take you long to see how very Balkan most of Croatia is - whatever Balkan means. My mantra has been "Balkans is as Balkans does" and boy, did the Croats behave like Balkans. Krajina is the perfect example. It's part of Croatia, but there were thousands of Serbs there, and during the war they tried to create their own little Serb republic. They weren't angels either, far from it. In areas like Benkovac, there were overwhelming Serb majorities. Okay. In 1994, the Croats and Bosnian Croat forces fighting with them, joined forces with the Bosniaks and launched what they called Operation Storm. By that time, the Croats and the Bosniaks had a lot of weapons. They not only pushed the Serbs out of Krajina, they kept right on going northeast. If NATO had not intervened, they would have captured Banja Luka, and the Serbs would have been very likely pushed out of large parts of Bosnia. That would have laid the groundwork for irredentist claims to justify the next war. So the U.S. made clear its view that the Croats and Bosniaks should not to push on to Banja Luka and they stopped the offensive. Okay, so now what do you have? You have around 20,000 Krajina Serbs in the Republika Srpska with claims in Kriena. It's highly likely that most of them will never go home. Meanwhile, in Krajina, you have Croats living in these Serbs' houses. Many of those Croats used to live in Derventa or in Banja Luka. You're talking about a de facto uneven swap, in which four or five thousand former RS Croats are living in the houses of Krajina Serbs. The rest of those houses have been allocated to homeless Croats from other areas. To make it more complicated, and this is something I got very involved in, the property laws are different in Croatia from what they are in Bosnia. In Croatia, the definition of ownership most often applies to the current tenant. Now, obviously, the current tenant is likely to be a Croat therefore the Croatian authorities give him or her a wink and say, you can stay there. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, I would add, in Serbia - the owner is defined as the last person to live in the house before the war. If that criterion were applied in Croatia, a house might well revert to a Krajina Serb who is now in Banja Luka. Actually a case was brought to the European Court of Justice in Strasbourg, by a Serb woman who had a house in Zadar, Croatia. She didn't make her case very well and was turned down, but I think there will be more claims along these lines. Croatia has unfinished business. I went to Zagreb for my farewell calls there in April or May of this year and said to them, "You've got to do better." By the way, the European Union knows this. They have conditioned Croatia's membership on an equitable and just settlement of this problem, and that's fine. Meanwhile, the Germans are pushing hard to finesse the problem and get them in the EU pronto.

Q: How did you find within the OSCE the cooperation?

BEECROFT: Before we get to that, there were other things we did. We had a department that did nothing but monitor and support the free press. We were helping develop a free press. I closed that department down a few months after I arrived, because it had basically done its job. The press in Bosnia and Herzegovina is lively, noisy, scrappy and a often fun. It certainly is under nobody's thumb. They don't know enough yet about reliable sources, but they're getting there. We also had a terrific democratization department, and they are still going strong. We are helping, at both the state level and the municipal level, to build governments that are responsive to people, not the other way around. There was no such thing as a help desk in any city hall in Bosnia, for example. There was no concept on the part of mayors about how to allocate tax receipts, because the ingrained habit was to call Belgrade and ask for more money. Well, Belgrade's not there any more, so they're now learning about funding and building a budget. Then there's education reform. Bosnia and Herzegovina was, and to some extent still is, a country with schools where textbooks look like something out of Mississippi in 196if you don't belong to our ethnic group, you're inferior. Segregation was everywhere, but based on ethnicity, not race. The OSCE Mission changed that, pressing for curriculum reform, textbook review, integrated classrooms, and local control of schools. Education reform was one of the things we did that I'm proudest of.

We also had a military reform department, headed by a retired British two-star general. The OSCE Mission supported the combining of the three former warring factions into a single military force with a single ministry of defense. That, let me tell you, was no small achievement.

Finally, we put together a small team of international auditors as a sort of a flying squad. They would go unannounced into publicly owned corporations and audit the books. This was all done in close cooperation with Lord Ashdown. We both had an interest in rooting out corruption. There was this unholy alliance of religious authorities, hardline politicians and mafias. They were sucking the life out of these corporations. This flying squad of a half a dozen people turned out to be invaluable. On issues like corruption and education, we had a symbiotic relationship with Paddy Ashdown.

Q: How did you find, you know, I mean when the UN was there you had the French going off with their way and the Americans, I mean the British. It was not well done at all. How was coordination between the various groups?

BEECROFT: I worked really hard on this. When I got there, my deputy was a German, and he was due to leave in 2002. He left in the summer of 2002 and went to Afghanistan. I needed a successor and it had to be European. There are two American heads of OSCE missions; I'm one and the other is in Kiev. For my new deputy, I was considering two countries in order to keep the balance and the money flowing: France and Russia. So I went separately to the French ambassador and the Russian ambassador in Sarajevo in the spring of 2002 and said, "Would you check with your capital and see if you've got somebody with ambassadorial rank who would like to be my deputy?" And they both came back with good candidates. After doing a little sounding in Vienna, I said, "I'll take them both." For the next year, I had both a French deputy and a Russian deputy, and we got along very well. Our flanks were covered. It immunized us to the pettiness of Vienna and the sometimes fractious relations among Washington and Moscow and Paris. Each of them had a part of the pie; it was a good division of responsibilities. My Russian deputy had been Ambassador in Peru and knew a lot about terrorism; that turned out to be very valuable because he had written a book on Fujimori and knew a lot about the shining path. When Washington and the EU began to focus on Bosnia because of the Al Qaeda connection, he was very useful.

My French deputy was an expert on political-military affairs who had served in Washington. He oversaw the education reform portfolio in its initial phases, and did a fine job. In 2004, when I left Sarajevo, he became France's bilateral Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina. It wasn't particularly onerous, but I made it a point of consulting periodically with Paris and Moscow, meeting with key officials in both capitals. They didn't micromanage me.

Q: From what you say I gather that your real problem was sort of the bureaucracy in Vienna?

BEECROFT: Oh, yes. Imagine a bureaucracy made up of people from 55 member states. They know that what makes the organization special is its field missions. Guess what they want to do? They want to help. Well, the best help they could give me was letting me run the mission. The way OSCE is set up, the Head of Mission is the final arbiter, but the bureaucracy in Vienna does everything they can to nibble away at that. At the end of the day, though, whether it's budget issues or selection of staff, it was my call. Fortunately I had a marvelous chief of staff, an Irishman. Now I know what blarney really means. This is a guy who had been, for the better part of 20 years, a lawyer in the Irish army judge advocate corps. He had the most wonderful stiletto and he used it with great care. He knew the Vienna headquarters like the back of his hand. He would go up there and poke around report, "Okay, this is what the next ticking time bomb is." I found that the best way to immunize myself, in addition to my two deputies, was to meet and brief the ambassadors of the OSCE states in Sarajevo and have them report back to capitals. OSCE has 55 member countries, and 29 of them had ambassadors in Sarajevo. I got together on a regular basis with the American and the Canadian and the Dutchman and the Belgian and the Frenchman and the Russian and Norwegian, you know, the whole list from, you know the motto of OSCE, "from Vancouver to Vladivostok." They would come to the OSCE Mission headquarters and my staff and I would give them a detailed briefing. I made sure that we included enough detail so they realized we were very busy and doing useful things, and that the most important thing they could do was to get their countries to provide us with good staff. This is how OSCE works, but it's also how the UN and NATO work. It's all about filling slots. Every country wants to make sure that it's appropriately represented.

On a given day, the Italian Ambassador might come in and say, "Bob, you know, you don't have any Italians as head of a regional center right now. We have a really good candidate." And he's leave me his candidate's CV. Here was where you could play Vienna off against Sarajevo. The applications went through Vienna, but I had the final decision. Vienna was obliged to do two things, recommend people whom they felt were worthy, and then stand back. But Vienna had to send me all the names, not just the ones they liked. I saw every applicant for every staff-level job. This took a lot of time, and you had to strike a balance. Shortly before I left, I selected the first Turkish head of a regional center. This man used to be the legal advisor to the prime minister, but when the government changed they were looking for a place to put him. He's great. We never had a Turk do this before. I had to be careful to put a Turk in a place where there were not only Muslims but Serbs, and I did that. The assignment process is like a conveyor belt - people coming in, people leaving.

The other thing that became clear is that some countries play this game better than others. The U.S. plays it very well. We contract out, so that most of our people sign a contract with a private company to work for OSCE. I was the exception, because I was seconded by Washington directly to the OSCE. The Brits are superb at the personnel game. The Canadians are also good. The Germans aren't bad, but there are some - the French, the Italians, the Spanish, the Russians - who don't have this knack. What you get from them is either people who are very senior, usually retired, or people who are very junior and don't care about being paid very much, but there's a great big gap in the middle. I had very few mid-level Frenchmen or mid-level Italians, but I had a French head of regional center who was a retired general and he was terrific. This is another one of these wrinkles in learning to play the staffing game, which is a big part of heading any international mission.

Q: What was your impression of the growing governing class in Bosnia?

BEECROFT: They were moving too slowly. That's one reason I was pushing so hard on the successor generation. If you look at the faces now in power at the end of 2004, I can count on the fingers on one hand people who were involved in politics in 1996, or even 1991. Many of them not only fought the war, but they helped start the war. This has got to be a lesson learned for future engagements. You have to force new faces forward faster than we did. Some government structures are taking hold quite well. There's a single military, not three "former warring factions." Foreign policy is developed from the center, not from Banja Luka; in 1996, the Republika Srpska had its own "foreign minister," but no longer. There's now an agreed common core curriculum for schools, even though you still have thirteen education ministers, which is eleven too many. It's a mixed picture, but there are at least the outlines of a sense of state, which is what I like to call it: yes, we are Croats, we are Bosniaks, we are Serbs, but our passport says Bosnia and Herzegovina and whether we like it or not, that's home.

Q: Were you seeing a certain, was it a new generation coming in, was it beginning to gel did you feel?

BEECROFT: Yes. I did feel that. It was uneven, the new generation was up against resistance from entrenched forces - mafia, or religious, or governmental. Those forces have their piece of the pie, and they don't want to lose it. That's why we focused so intently on the successor generation initiative: identify the comers, push them up, encourage them.

Q: How did you find the Republika Srpska integrating?

BEECROFT: A lot better than I ever would have dreamt of in 1996, in spite of the fact that Karadi? is still seen as a folk hero in the deep valleys and dark forests. If you go to the town of Prijedor today, you can't believe it. Prijedor in 1992 and 1993 was home to the Omarska camp, arguably the most horrible concentration camp in Europe since Auschwitz. Today, Prijedor's minarets and mosques have been rebuilt. Prijedor is in the Republika Srpska. Many Bosniaks who used to live near Prijedor are back. If you go to Banja Luka, you don't see a whole lot of Cyrillic any more, because when you're online you're using the Latin alphabet. Both the University of Banja Luka and the Banja Luka business college are doing well. If you go to the worst parts of the eastern RS, Fo?a for example, the mayor of Fo?a is a decent and tolerant man who has worked hard and successfully to get the Bosniaks to come back. The mosque has been rebuilt in Fo?a. It, and every mosque in the eastern RS, were flattened during the war.

Q: Oh, yes. Well, you know in the '90s, during the war, Europe was flooded with young people just from the area of all types just getting the hell out. This wasn't their thing and they often were, I mean they just, they were waiting on tables in Berlin or what have you.

BEECROFT: Correct. Now they own restaurants.

Q: Was there an incoming or not?

BEECROFT: Some came back, some didn't. As usual it's a mixed picture. My secretary and personal assistant, for example, a wonderful woman. She went to high school in Texas during the war. She speaks English like a Texan. She's now come home. She had family and she came back, but some members of her family didn't. So it will never be what it was, but it will never be as bad as it might have been.

Q: Well, we're about at the end of this I think, but a question I have to ask, Bob, I'm afraid I know the answer, but here you went through what amounts to a nation building. I mean you had long experience in this and you and some of your colleagues. Has anybody ever worked with you other than just to sit down and chat talking about what to do in Iraq?

BEECROFT: No. Funny you should ask that. I met not long ago with Carlos Pasqual, at my request. We knew each other slightly. We had a good talk. One of his deputies used to be the DCM in Sarajevo so there is a link, but as far as I know, there is no structured procedure for picking the brains of people who have been involved in nation-building, or as I prefer to call it, state-building. Actually I think there is probably more interest in places like CIA than there is in State or DoD. It's as if the administration isn't interested in any experiences that aren't its own. Do they really think they know it all?

Q: What about here, we're doing this at the National Defense University, what sort of interest is there of the up and coming general officers, flag officers?

BEECROFT: There's a lot. As I said, one of the things they've discovered is that how you treat the people matters a whole lot in determining how they treat you. I think I mentioned that a USAID colleague of mine and I will do an elective course in the spring semester, starting in January or early February, on "failed states and peace operations." The way it works here is that they encourage the visiting faculty to draw on their strong suits. There's an electives fair, and students can shop around and see what electives they want to take. We are so oversubscribed for our course that we're going to have to do a triage to select our students. Yes, there is lively interest, and this will be a big challenge, but we're going to use this elective basically to come up with recommendations for Carlos Pasqual.

Q: Carlos Pasqual is?

BEECROFT: He is the head of this new office of the Department of State, S/CRS, which is responsible government-wide for the non-military aspects of peace operations. Great timing.

End of interview